Western Story

Every Week Magazine Jan. 26, 1929

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A STREET AND SMITH PUBLICATION

"Over the rock with yore artillery. Up yore hands, an' foller 'em slow."

from RIDIN' LUCK By ROBERT ORMOND CASE

In Next Week's Issue of Western Story Magazine

THE BOSS OF SKULL MESA
By Kenneth Perkins

A wild horse king demands the same instant obedience that a monarch of men requires, but he has to show that he is worthy of it.

HARDROCK BEARDS THE GOAT
By Seth Ranger

Some tough goat was Bill Flanagan, but Hardrock "rode" him.

TOUCHED BY GOLD
By Hugh F. Grinstead

Gold is a good goal, but you must play fair if you've to reach and hold it.

WINDY'S FOWL PLAY
By Robert Ormond Case

Fifty years old, lean as a snake, and hostile as a cornered badger. Yes, sir, that was "Windy" Delong.

Also Features by

Max Brand — Roland Krebs
George Gilbert — And Others

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In This Week's Issue of

DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE

THE BLACK CANOE
By Madeleine Sharps Buchanan

Madly, they scrambled for gold, and in the grim onslaught they all got theirs.

SIGNALS AND SHADOWS
By Bryan Irvine

Bragging crooks spurred him on, but a woman decided his fate.

STUFFED CROOKS
By John D. Swain

They were just too stuffed to budge

Also Features by

Judson P. Philips — Frederick Ames Coates
Charlotte Dockstader — And Others

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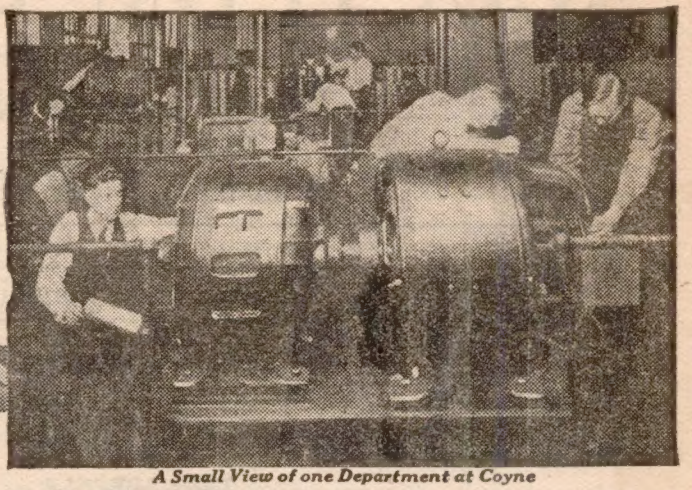
"The Old Way"



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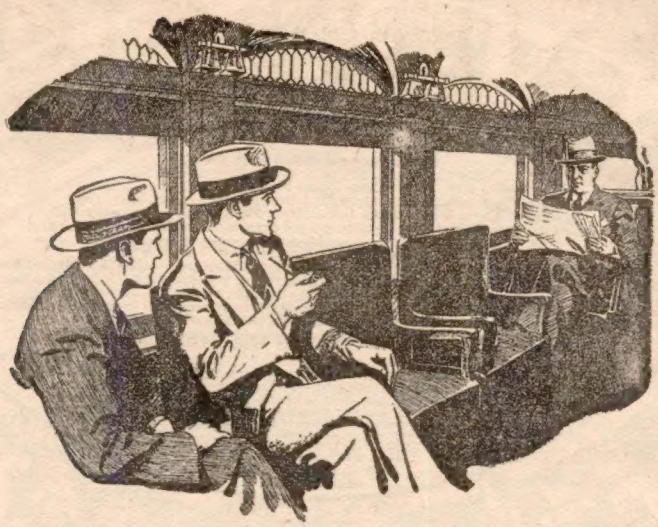

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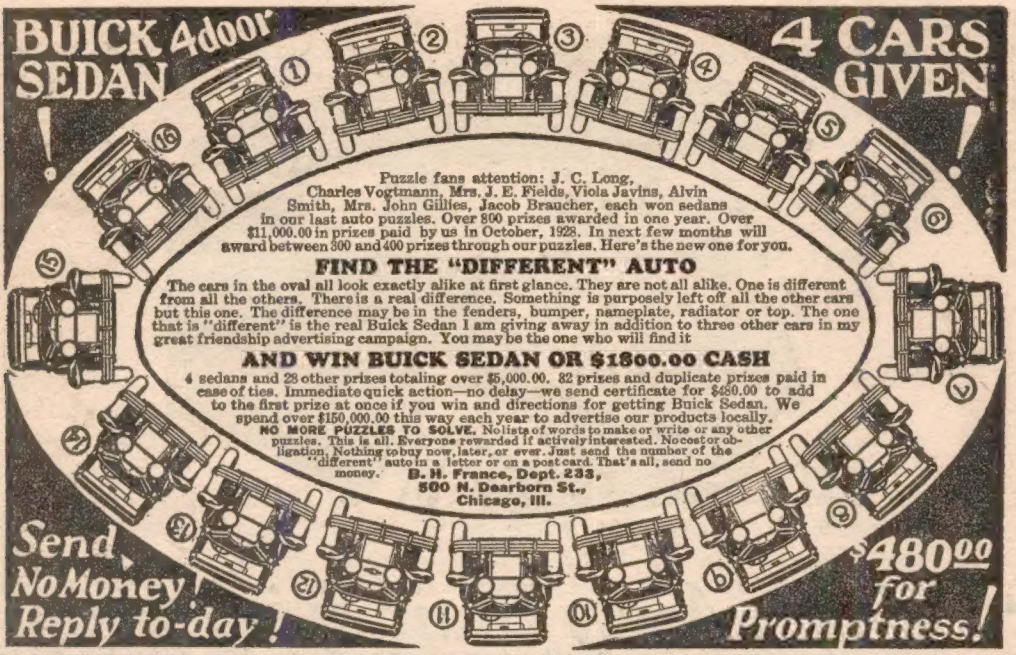

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I half rose from my seat, bowed awkwardly and mumbled, "I'm afraid you'll have to excuse me today," and dropped back in my chair.

Speechless—when a few words would have made me! The opportunity I had been waiting for all my life—and I had thrown it away! If I could have made a simple little speech—giving my opinion of trade conditions in a concise, witty, interesting way, I know I would have been made for life!

Always I have been a victim of paralyzing stage fright. Because of my timidity, my diffidence, I was just a nobody, with no knack of impressing others—of putting myself across. No matter how hard I worked, it all went for nothing—I could never win the big positions, the important offices, simply because I was tongue-tied in public.

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• • • • •

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In 20 Minutes a Day

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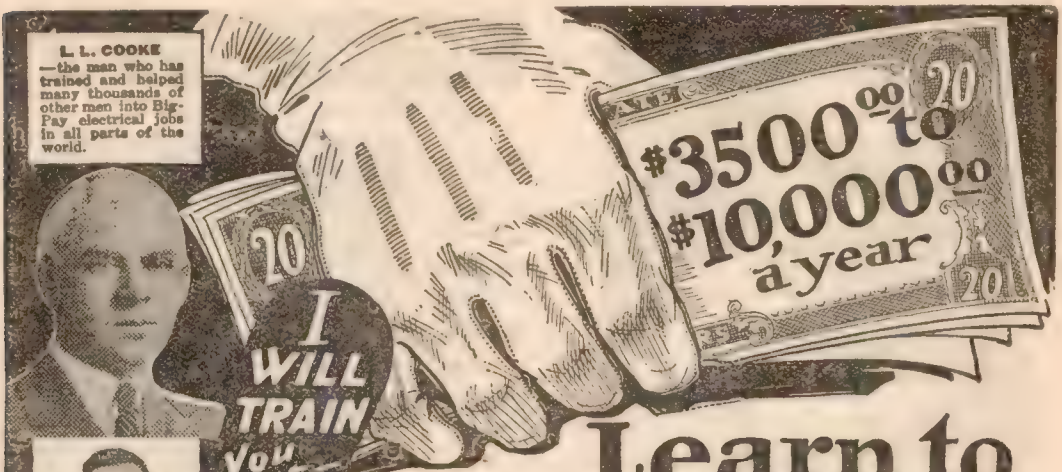

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$30 A DAY!
"Dear Mr. Cooke: I was making $25 a week, when I enrolled. Now with my own Electrical Shop I make as high as $30 a day."
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DON'T be a wage slave all your life—don't spend your best days in a miserable $25 to $35 a week job—pinching the pennies and barely making ends meet—when thousands of men no smarter nor luckier than you, are drawing down $70 to $200 every Saturday as "Cooke" Trained Electrical Experts. It's your own fault if you don't do the same. Blame yourself if your pay is small when I've made it so easy for you to learn to earn $3,500 to $10,000 a year in Electricity!

Be a "Cooke" Trained Man

I'll show you how—in your spare time—in the quiet of your own home—without losing a minute from your regular job! I'll train you in a clear, simple, quickly-grasped unforgettable way with my famous "Work Sheet" and "Job Ticket" Method—the same method that has landed more than 10,000 fellows like you in $3,500 to $10,000 a year jobs—the same method that Electrical men are praising and great Electrical concerns recommend to their employees.

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Don't think for a minute that you need a college education or a high school diploma to become a "Cooke" Trained Big-Pay Man. You don't! Mighty few of my "boys" ever went farther than grade school. But that was no drawback. With the Six Big Outfits of tools and apparatus that I furnish without extra charge, they got simplified, practical training along work shop lines. They learned by doing—they learned thoroughly—just as if I was constantly at their elbow. And in no time at all they were experts—commanding, and getting, Big-Pay!

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Another amazing thing about "Cooke" Training is that it pays for itself as you go along. Yes, Sir! You'll hardly have begun the Course when I'll show you how to make your spare hours count for cash! I'll show you how to get jobs—how to do the work—what to charge! And all while you're still learning! Afterwards comes the Big Job—the Big Pay—the great opportunities that will make you independent the rest of your days.

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Don't delay! Get started! Mail coupon right now for my Big Book—the same book that has raised the pay of thousands of men—the book that will show you—yes, prove to you—why "The COOKE Trained Man is The BIG-PAY Man"—always and everywhere! It's FREE—just mail coupon—at once!

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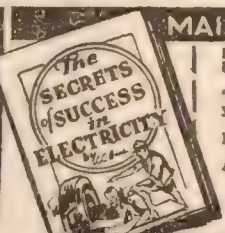

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The Man I Pity Most

POOR OLD Jones. I see him now, standing there, dejected, cringing, afraid of the world. No one had any use for him. No one respected him. He just lived on. A poor worn out imitation of a man doing his sorry best to get on in the world. If he had realized just one thing, he could have made good. He might have been a brilliant success.

There are thousands and thousands of men like Jones. They, too, could be happy, successful, respected and loved. But they can't seem to realize the one big fact—that practically everything worth while living for depends upon STRENGTH—upon live, red-blooded, he-man muscle.

Everything you do depends upon strength. No matter what your occupation, you need the health, vitality and clear thinking only big, strong virile muscles can give you.

Here's a Short-cut to Strength and Success

But, you say, "It takes years to build my body up to the point where it will equal those of athletic champions." It does if you go about it without any system, **but there's a scientific short-cut.** And that's where I come in.

30 Days Is All I Need

In just 30 days I can do things with your body you never thought possible. With just a few minutes' work every morning, I will add one full inch of real, live muscle to each of your arms, and two whole inches across your chest. Many of my pupils have gained more than that, but I GUARANTEE to do at least that much for you in one short month. Your neck will grow shapely, your shoulders begin to broaden. Your friends will wonder what has come over you. You'll look ten years younger, and you'll feel like it, too. Work will be easy.

I Strenghten Those Inner Organs, Too

But I'm not through with you. I want ninety days in all to do the job right, and then all I ask is that you stand in front of your mirror and look yourself over.

What a marvelous change! Those great squared shoulders! That pair of huge, lithe arms! Those firm, shapely legs! Yes, sir. They are yours, and they are there to stay. You'll be just as fit inside as you are out, too, because I work on your heart, your liver—all of your inner organs—strengthening and exercising them. Yes, indeed, life can give you a greater thrill than you ever dreamed. But, remember, the only sure road to health, strength and happiness **always demands action.** Fill out the coupon below and mail it today. **Write now!**

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It contains forty-eight full-page photographs of myself and some of the many prize-winning pupils I have trained. Some of these came to me as pitiful weaklings, imploring me to help them. Look them over now and you will marvel at their present physiques. This book will prove an impetus and a real inspiration. Send today—right now before you turn this page.

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New, wonderful 1929 models. 8 tubes — Single Dial—long distance Console or table models — shipped

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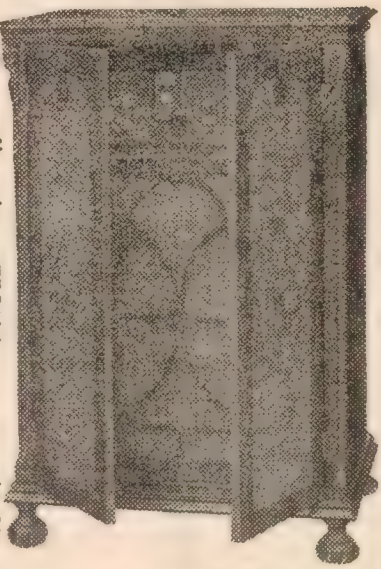

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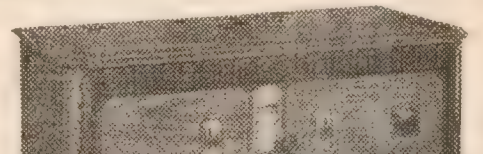
Metro's latest achievement—the world's greatest radio value. Powerful long-distance 8-tube receiver—clearness of tone that is astounding—ultra-selective. Radio engineers pronounced it the ultimate for all-around perfection. To prove our claims, we will send this marvelous set to you direct from our factory on **30 days' free trial.** Compare its quality, beauty and price with any other radio on the market, and decide to keep it only after you are satisfied that the new 1929 Metrodyne Super-Eight is the peer of them all.

Eight powerful tubes. Highest quality low loss parts. Illuminated single dial. Positive switch control—simply turn a knob and it's on. Select your stations with accuracy at any desired volume. Beauty of tone unsurpassed. Console and table cabinets are handsomely grained genuine walnut, hand rubbed, in two-tone effect—artistically carved trimmings. All metal parts finished in two-tone gold. Seeing is believing. **YOU WILL BE THE JUDGE.**



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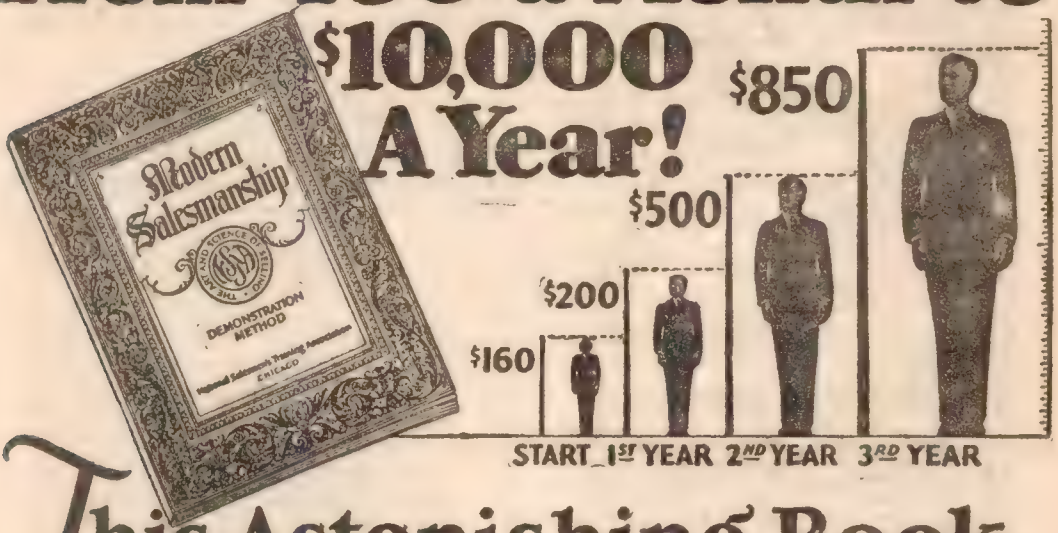

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TRUTH is stranger than fiction! And the true story that happened to R. B. Hansen proves it! His experience is not only intensely INTERESTING—but it will prove a revelation and positive inspiration to every ambitious man who reads this page.

Not long ago Hansen was working as a foreman in a rubber plant. His salary was $150 a month. That meant skimping and petty economies that are bound to irk ANY ambitious man. Naturally he was keenly dissatisfied—but like so many other men caught in blind-alley jobs, he didn't know how to get out!

And then one day something happened! A certain book fell into his hands. Between its covers he discovered a certain force that eventually led him to rewards beyond his fondest expectations. Inspired to action and with his feet firmly guided to the first rungs of the ladder to Success, Hansen went into business for himself. And within a short time he had boosted his earnings to $10,000 a year!

Salary Increases—200% to 900%!

A lucky accident? Not a bit of it! Hansen is not alone in his achievement of success after reading this remarkable book. OTHER men who have increased their salaries amazingly after reading these vital facts are numbered in the thousands! For example, C. W. Birmingham of Ohio read it and his salary raised from $15 a week to $7,500 a year. Wm. Shore of California made $3,000 his first 5 months. And O. D. Oliver of Oklahoma, who used to earn $200 a month, now makes as much as $1,000 in a single week!

How did they do it? What did the book show them? Just this:—Every one of these men realized that Salesmanship offers BIGGER rewards and delivers them QUICKER than any other line of work under the sun. This vital book, "Modern Salesmanship," introduced them to hundreds of surprising and little-known facts about the highest paid of all professions,—SALESMANSHIP. It blasted dozens of old theories, explained the science of selling in simple terms and told them exactly how the great sales records of nationally-known star salesmen have been achieved. And not only that, it outlined a simple plan that will enable almost any man to master scientific salesmanship without spending years on the road—without losing a day or dollar from his present position.

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If we were asking two or three dollars a copy for "Modern Salesmanship" you might hesitate. But it is now FREE. We cannot urge you too strongly to take advantage of this opportunity to see for yourself what salesmanship has done for others—and what the National Salesmen's Training Association stands ready and willing to do for you. Find out exactly what the underlying principles of salesmanship are—and how you can put them to work for you. No matter what your opinion is now, "Modern Salesmanship" will give you a new insight into this fascinating and highly-paid profession.

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Dept. A-581 N. S. T. A. Bldg. Chicago, Ill.

National Salesmen's Training Ass'n,
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Chicago, Illinois.

Without cost or obligation you may send me your book, "Modern Salesmanship," with details of your system of training and FREE employment service.

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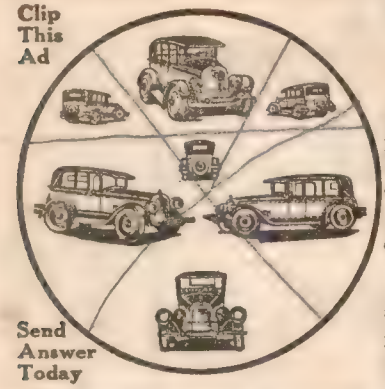

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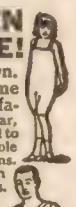

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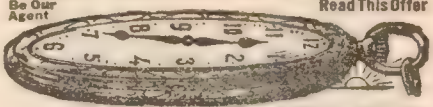

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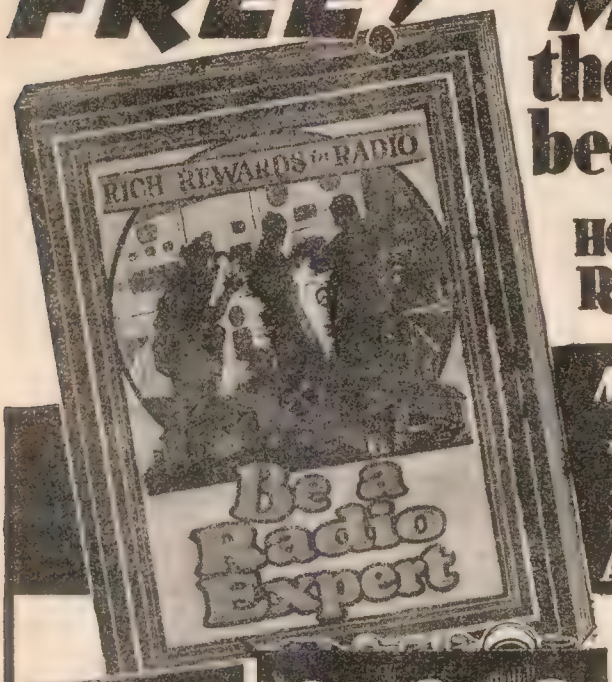
HOW TO GET INTO THE RADIO BUSINESS~

J.E.S.



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With them you can build 100 different circuits—learn the "how" and "why" of practically every type of Radio set. This kind of training fits you to step into the good jobs—sends you out an experienced Radio expert. When you complete, my Employment Department will help you get a big Radio job like Graduate Edward Stanko, Chief Operator of Station WGH, or Frank M. Jones, 922 Guadalupe St., San Angelo, Tex., builder and operator of Station KGFI and Manager of the best equipped Radio shop in the Southwest, or help you start a Radio business of your own like Richard Butler, 1419 No. 17th St., Phila., Pa., who made around $500 a month compared with a job as motorman when he enrolled.

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A famous rupture specialist with a record of more than 20,000 cases will send you free of cost a newly-edited book that contains amazing new discoveries about rupture relief . . . case histories galore . . . illustrated in detail. A few of the facts contained in this free book are given below. But do this right now. Tear out the coupon at the right and send for this unusual book!

Can Rupture Be Exercised Away? Get Newest Book Now FREE to Ruptured

"IT was twenty years ago when I first got ruptured. Today I consider myself entirely cured. Your system is nothing short of marvelous." John Miller, Jr. "Some months ago I ordered your outfit for the treatment of rupture of my son. Our doctor fitted it on him and he was skeptical it would help cure the condition, for it was one of the worst ruptures he had ever seen. Five months later I took the boy back to the doctor. He examined him and pronounced the rupture completely healed." D. E. Lytle, Orrville, Ohio.

These are but two of many astounding letters received from people, many of whom had despaired of obtaining relief from the torture and agony of rupture.

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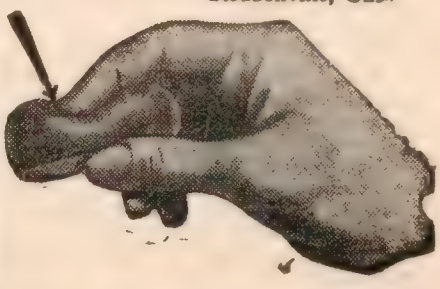

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Ridin' Luck~

by Robert Ormond Case

Author of "Dynamite Goes Up," etc.

IT was in late afternoon that "Buck" Yocum, bearing in an easterly direction across the sweltering alkali flats toward the Gap, became aware of another rider approaching from the south. The mounted one was the sole sign of life against the shimmering horizon. Buck rubbed his dust-begrimed eyelids and peered again. An irritable scowl settled on his sunburned, somewhat boyish features as his scrutiny told him that the course of the approaching rider was converging on his own.

He considered the advisability of accelerating his pace as a hint that he did not welcome company. But his paint pony, after three days of continuous riding, was trail-weary and plodding. It would be sheer cruelty, in the heat and time of day, to force the willing animal to extend itself. Nor was it worth while to change his course in the hope of avoiding an encounter, for the water hole beside which he proposed to make camp, he had been told back at Pine City, lay in a direct line toward the Gap.

He resigned himself, therefore, with a species of apathetic resentment, to the prospect of a meeting with some gar-

rulous wayfarer who, like most pilgrims of the high desert, would be thirsting for an opportunity to make talk. It was just his luck, he told himself gloomily. During the two preceding days he had ridden alone. In Judson Corners, Saline, and Pine City, hamlets along the way, he had wrapped himself up in his newly acquired mantle of somber aloofness and had been left to himself. In centers of population along the desert trail he had found solitude. Now, this rider had popped up like a badger in the apparently lifeless expanse and could not be avoided. Buck yawned as he thought of the interminable hours ahead during which the talkative one would undoubtedly ply him with anecdotes concerning his own career, discuss politics, religion, the price of beef, and other subjects common to the uninteresting life upon which he, Buck Yocum, had turned his back forever.

With callous disinterest, he studied the other as he drew close enough for a detailed scrutiny. The newcomer was a somewhat older man than himself, dusty of clothing and feature, with a mustache dropping beneath a faded sombrero. With a pessimistic tolerance, Buck classified him instantly. A colorless person, dry and uninteresting as the mesquite on the blistering ridges. A product of the range, perhaps the owner of some small holdings in the foothills and a small band of beef.

Only his horse and his gun were worthy of even passing notice. The horse was a rangy, powerful black, dust-streaked at the moment, but undoubtedly an animal of spirit and breeding. The weapon in a light holster was long-barreled and spotless. This was typical of old-timers of the range country, Buck knew; they might be indigent in point of worldly possessions, but horse and six-guns were treasures. No doubt he, Buck, would be regaled presently with anecdotes concerning the unparalleled intelligence and faithfulness of the horse and the marvelous accuracy of the gun.

For his own part, Buck found himself scrutinized as the other drew near. The approaching one's faded eyes seemed to pass over him carelessly, yet with a vague suggestion of intentness; noting his gun, blanket roll, and bulging saddlebags and appraising the paint pony. Buck was irritated to note a friendly, self-deprecatory grin wrinkling the dusty, deeply-lined features as the other arrived within hailing distance.

"Howdy, Bub."

"Howdy," responded Buck gruffly, resentful that the other's salutation had taken note of their disparity in years.

"Hot, ain't it?"

Buck merely grunted. With the weather disposed of, he knew almost to a certainty what the next question would be. The old-timer looped a leg over the saddle horn, drew forth the makings, and rolled a cigarette.

"Stranger in these parts, huh?" he queried.

"Giddap, Baldy," growled Buck. "Yeah, mister, I'm a stranger in these parts. Name's Buck Yocum. Up till last Tuesday I was wranglin' for the Bell-A, south of Judson Corners. I'm headin' for the Big Bend country. I'm twenty-two next month. Born in Alabam' an' my folks is Democrats. Is that a plenty?"

"No offense," murmured the other, appearing to be taken aback by this brusqueness.

"An' I don't give a dang who you are," continued Buck sourly. "Your affairs don't interest me none whatever. Yeah, I can see you got a fair-to-middlin' hoss. An' that noble piece of artillery you're carryin' can onquestionably shoot the eyeteeth out of a mosquito at a half mile or more. But don't you wear yoreself out tellin' me what a fine little homestead you got over in the hills, an' how many bald-faced

calves you branded this spring, an' what a swell lay-out you got if you only had a windmill instead of a rope an' bucket at the water hole, an' the details of whatever roarin' activity fetched you out in fryin'-pan weather like this can remain at the head of the list of mysterious things. Do I make myself plain?"

"Well," said the other, with a deprecatory cough, "they's nothin' in them specifications to be ashamed of, is they? Only thing is, I don't use no rope an' bucket at the water hole. I got an A-1 spring, which I shorely hate to leave an' drink this alkali stuff which rots a gent's system. It's real water in that there spring. But I ain't going to talk about them things," he broke off, and added, plaintively, "You hadn't ought to be so hard-boiled that a way. An' me a perfect stranger to you!"

"I'm hard," affirmed Buck, "an' so poison mean I growl in my sleep. I aim to get meaner an' harder from now on, so that where I cast a shadow the grass won't grow no more an' when I pass folks will turn their faces away. That's the kind of a lone trail I aim to take. Which is also why I didn't make the said welkin ring with joyful huzzahs when you come slopin' up. I'm just that frank an' out-spoken."

With a sigh, the other returned his foot to the stirrup and gathered up the reins.

"It's too dang' hot to speed up my critter," he said humbly. "An' I don't want to waste time by trailin' behind, because I'm likewise headin' for the Gap. But I ain't the kind of a gent who would horn in where he ain't wanted. So I reckon I'll pull off a little piece an' leave you to that said solitude you crave. I didn't aim to rile you that a way. Just felt a mite lonely an' craved a little neighborin'."

His shoulders were hunched, and his mustache drooped so mournfully that Buck weakened.

"Hold on," he said, though the other had not actually turned away. "I reckon maybe you're entitled to struggle along. You had no means of knowin' I was such a cross-grained an' hostile maverick when you come projectin' up so hopeful. Now that you're here, half the trail's yours."

"Much obliged," said the other, brightening. "Now that's real white of you."

"And on the other hand," Buck warned, "don't you get the idea I'm strivin' to please. You an' me'll have a regular visit, just so they ain't too much loose an' profitless conversation, which riles me. I'm a lone wolf, mister, plumb soured an' savage."

"I can see that," the other agreed, "an' I can't help wonderin' how you got that way. Not that it makes any difference to me," he added hastily, "I ain't aimin' to pry into yore personal affairs none whatever. But it does seem like a tough break that a young upstandin' feller like you should be in such a shape. Mean an' hard that a way."

Buck scowled upon him searchingly. But the other's manner gave no hint of facetious intent. He was not even looking in his direction. He sat relaxed in the saddle, and beneath the brim of his dusty sombrero his gaze seemed to be focused on that point in the shimmering horizon ahead where the giant sawtooth pinnacles sloped down toward the Gap. Buck, too, relaxed, and a more tolerant mood enveloped him.

"Well, mister," he said, "I'll tell you a thing or two. It just so happens that I been pushin' right along the last two three days, avoidin' folks and makin' camp alone. But even a feller like me, who's turned his back on life, in a manner of speaking, has got to loosen up once in a while. Now, it's plain that you're one of them average citizens whose habits of life has got him rooted down like one of them junipers, if you

get what I mean. You do the same things each day, meet the same folks. Tuesdays is likewise Thursdays, and when your time comes you pass out peaceful. So you'll be some surprised to learn that I'm an outlaw."

"An outlaw!" breathed the other, obviously staggered by this blunt statement. "You mean a gunman? Something like this buzzard they call the 'Saline Snake'?"

"Never heard of this Snake person," said Buck, somewhat complacently, "but if he's a mean, rattlin' sidewinder, him an' me's a pair."

"Never heard of him?" repeated the other, peering at the youth in mild surprise. "Folks is all riled up about him in these parts. It don't seem reasonable that you could come through Saline an' Pine City without hearin' talk. They's two thousand dollars reward money posted for him, dead or alive."

"I didn't make talk with anybody when I come through them villages," said the youth. "Didn't see many folks in the streets, an' I rode right through."

"Most folks was out with the posses, I reckon."

"Didn't meet up with no posses, either," said the youth.

"We'll prob'ly meet up with some before we hit the Gap," opined the other. He waved a hand toward the encircling mesas to the north. "They're combin' the hills. As a law-abidin' citizen I reckon I should have joined up with them."—he hunched his shoulders—"but I ain't cut out for that kind of activity. An' I had business over beyond the Gap which I just naturally couldn't put off. I don't cotton to gallivantin' around either, with a bad hombre like that runnin' wild."

"I'll gamble you don't," agreed Buck. "But it don't bother me none. Them bad hombres is the precise gents I aim to associate with from now on. I ain't got any record yet, but folks is going to hear about me before long. It'll be plenty, too, so they'll forget all about this Snake person. When you hear reports comin' down from the Big Bend country about 'Poison' Yocum, or 'Lightnin'' Yocum, or whatever they hang on me when I start blazin' a trail, an' yore neighbors is talkin' it over, you can make them pop-eyed by tellin' 'em that you rode alongside that wolf out in the flats."

"Now, that's something that's got me considerably puzzled," said the other, favoring the youth with a sidelong, apologetic glance. "If you don't mind my askin' it, how come you decided to embark on this said career of crime? I've been around some in my time, an' observed human nature considerable, an' I always figgered a bad hombre got that way in the first place by havin' some jack pot thrust upon him, in a manner of speaking. You're the first feller I ever run up against that just deliberately decided to turn the hand of the whole world against him."

"Well, sir, I'll tell you," said Buck. "I'm a short-tempered gent that can only be pushed just so far. When circumstances kind of snarl me around and tromp on my toes that a way, I got to bust loose. Enough things has happened to me lately to make an angel lay down his harp. They would make a graven image do a war dance. They would make a horned toad sing like a lark. So I've shorely busted an' am on my way."

"They was awful, I'll bet," agreed the other sympathetically. "What things, Bub?"

"Last Friday night," began Buck, scowling, "when it was frying-pan weather on the Bell-A, somebody had to sink some post holes along the line fence. An' who was the royal goat the boss selected for that A-1 honor? Me, by gravy! An' after I'd busted my back and blistered my hands sinkin' holes in that hard pan, I come limpin' home late to the cook shack to find them uncurried

savages who'd rode easy all day had et all the seconds on the pie. One hunk left for me which wasn't big enough to make a jack rabbit lay down his ears!"

"No question about it," the other shook his head, tugging at his mustache. "That wasn't right."

"On Saturday night," the youth continued, with some bitterness, "they was a poker game in the bunk house. Now, I ain't the kind of gent that spreads himself promiscuous in a friendly game. I play accordin' to Hoyle, ride my luck when it's breakin' right, an' close to my belt when the breaks is goin' against me; so when I drew a straight flush, cold, under the gun, I didn't open. It was jack pots, you understand, six of us, an' openers had been fallin' reg'lar. Well, sir, when the first feller on my left passes and the next, I didn't think nothin' of it; but when the next buzzard passes I begin to get cold back of the ears, because it was the first time in my life I ever drew a straight flush that a way. An' do you know what happened? Not a blasted one of them opened. Not a one!"

"You had to throw that A-1 hand into the discard?" The other clucked sympathetically. " 'Sawful!"

"An' that ain't the half of it, mister. On the next hand, the very next, mind you, I drew four jacks an' bet my wad. I get action a-plenty an' a grinnin' hyena named Shea stays on a couple of kings an' draws two more. That plumb ruined me. I slunk away pronto, an' dang' near tied myself into knots tryin' to bite off my own ears."

"Things kind of moved in on you, at that," agreed the older man, scratching his jaw. "What else?"

"Plenty," stated the youth morosely. "I drug one dollar out of that poker game. One round, shiny simoleon, which I stuck in my jeans. The next day, which was Sunday, I dolled up like a range king an' sloped in to town. I had a gal——" He pulled his hat lower over his eyes. "Her name was Phoebe, an' I aimed to take her to the skatin' rink. When we got into that blasted skatin' rink, which was crowded with folks we both of us knew, an' Phoebe'd gotten her skates strapped on, an' I also was all set to show the spectators how it ought to be done, I reached in my pocket for that said dollar. But the maverick wasn't there. I'd left it in my other pants. When I told Phoebe what a jack pot I was in, she was some concerned an' hostile; an' when I seen a pal from the ranch whose name was Bones, I eased over to where he was puttin' on his skates, an' says to him: 'Bones,' I says, 'I done made the fatal error of leavin' my cash at the ranch an' me an' Phoebe are all set to slide along. Slip me a buck,' I says, 'an' save my scalp.'

"An' do you know what this superheated half-portion of a Bones done to me? He claimed to be a friend of mine, you understand. Well, sir, the slinkin' polecat looks me in the eye thoughtful an' considerate. 'Sho,' he says, 'don't you worry none, Buck, me lad. I'll buy them tickets.' Which he done, an' he likewise snatches up Phoebe and flits out onto the floor with her, whisperin' in her ear that I've done remembered that this ain't the day I intended to skate, an' will she do him the honor? So I charge after them, aimin' to grasp that four-flusher by the face and make him snap like a whip. But them skatin'-rink bouncers gang up on me and heave me out on my ear. I never got to see Phoebe a-tall. Out to the ranch, when Bones comes struttin' home, the gang all give me the horse laugh. Thinkin' it over, I wasn't in the mood to make hash out of Bones. I figgered it was just another one of them things."

Buck glowered unseeingly into the shimmering distance. The older man tugged at his mustache and said nothing, but sympathy radiated from him.

"The next day," continued Buck, with

stony calm, "which was Monday, I was forkin' a ga'nt, slab-sided, Roman-nosed sorrel that had been out on grass for a month an' was a mite skittish. Well, sir, that sulphurous hunk of hoss-flesh, which wasn't by no stretch of the imagination a world-buckin' horse, caught me unawares an' sent me soarin' like an eagle. It was over by the water trough, an' right below this said water trough was a hog waller, in which I lit, like a blasted bird flappin' its blasted wings. Yeah, except that I lit on my back an' the joyful crew watchin'! When I come crawlin' out of that scented mud, it didn't require the grief-stricken wails of them paralyzed polecats to tell me I'd done reached the limit. I didn't have my back to the wall. I was done pushed clean through it. It was the said bale of straw that busted the camel's back. After that, they wasn't any more. It was the end."

He spoke with suppressed bitterness, and turned a glowering countenance darkened with inward emotion upon his companion. The older man looked away, as a thoughtful and sensitive soul turns his face from the sight of ravaging grief, and pulled his hat lower over his eyes. His shoulders shook. He was racked suddenly with a spasm of coughing, bending low in the saddle, arms clasped about his middle. From this position he unfolded slowly. He blinked at the youth, drew forth a dusty bandanna and wiped his eyes, the horns of his mustache quivering.

"Excuse it, please," he murmured. "This blasted dust gets into a feller's lungs that a way. Yeah, that was shorely one procession of haywire breaks, Bub. Was that all?"

"All!" echoed Buck, outraged. "You're just the kind of a gent that would ask such a question. It was plenty, mister. It didn't take no inner voice to point out that the whole blasted world was gangin' up on me an' I might as well call the bluff. So I come crawlin' out of that hog waller and waltzed up to the boss and politely requested him to write it out. He done so, an' I combed the burrs out of my paint pony's tail, tied on poncho an' canteen, oiled up my gun, an' hit the trail."

"Yeah, but what I aimed to say"—the older man seemed to search for the right words—"demoralizin' as them jack pots undoubtedly was, seems like a feller could have outlived 'em. Shorely to goodness, you'd figgered some on this outlaw business before circumstances kind of got a foul hold on you that a way?"

"Well," Buck admitted, "I had practiced considerable with my ol' six-gun. An' I got to be greased lightnin' on the draw. You'd be surprised. I reckon I'm one of them natural gunmen. Also, this here's shorely a noble piece of artillery, mister. They don't come no better. But when it comes to shootin' irons——"

"Yeah. Yeah, sure!" The other agreed. "I don't doubt it a-tall. But you was gettin' ready for this said career of crime all the while? What I mean is, you was drove to it, but you was also kind of willin' just the same, huh?"

"I'd figgered on it some," said the youth. "I suspicioned some day I would be forced outside the pale of society an' when the time come I aimed to be prepared. When I lost with them four jacks, I had a hunch the chapter was nearly done, if you get what I mean. When that double-crossin' Bones stole my Phoebe, an' them skatin'-rink bouncers give me the bum's rush for the benefit of the pop-eyed populace, it was dang' near a certainty. It was when that slab-sided roan sent me into a tail spin and I was hoverin' over that blasted hog waller that I said to myself: 'Cowboy, that said eleventh hour struck a couple hours ago. You're on yore way.'"

"An' where," questioned the older

man, "do you aim to blaze this said trail?"

"Up in the Big Bend country," said Buck, "where I ain't known. I aim to bust on 'em like an avengin' angel. They'll wake up some morning to find a fire-spittin' monster in their midst. An' after I've made a reputation, I'll drift back down around my old stampin' grounds an' ease into the circle around the chuck-wagon fire. When some buzzard gives me the once over, like that grinnin' Shea or that no-account Bones, and says, 'Well, well, here's that lowly cowboy, Buck Yocum, that's come back to the roost,' I'll say: 'Hold on, slaves! You've heard of that hombre, "Blitzen" Yocum, who raised such Ned up in the Big Bend country? Well, fellow citizens, that's me. Nice night, ain't it?' "

"An' what particular brand of crime," the other persisted, "do you aim to specialize in?"

"No murders," Buck specified. "Hold-ups a-plenty. Corporation pay rolls goin' up to the mines. On Saturday nights I'll line up the gamblers at the bar. Maybe I'll stick up a stage-coach or two. I'll never shoot nobody 'less they go for their guns. Then I'll beat 'em to the draw."

"H'm." The other nodded. "I can see you got it all figgered out," said he.

He ruminated in silence for a space, tugging at his mustache. His mild eyes were fixed on a point in the shimmering foreground, below the crumbling mesa wall, where a dust cloud moved slowly.

"Bub," he said at length, "I can see you're a feller that's set in his ways. When you start something you finish it. When you've placed yore bets, it's final, huh?"

"That's me," agreed Buck. "You couldn't have put it no better."

"But, on the other hand, even though you're equipped like granite that a way, it's been two-three days since you left the Bell-A down yonder. Ain't you weakened since you been trailin' alone?"

"None whatever," said Buck firmly.

"Didn't feel lonesome a-tall when you come through Saline an' Pine City, avoidin' folks that a way? Or in the midst of the night whilst you was rolled up in yore poncho an' the coyotes was doin' their war dance over on the ridges and they was only yore saddle hoss near by, didn't something kind of take hold of you inside? Honest now, Bub, didn't you have no regrets—wondered maybe if you wasn't turnin' yore back on more than grief?"

"Well," Buck admitted, hanging his head, "when I thought of Phoebe I had a kind of all-gone feelin'. But I'll get used to that. I ain't kiddin' myself any about the trail I took. They's rocks in it."

"True," the other nodded. "You've done a little ponderin', at that. 'With privileges come responsibilities' is somethin' I learned once. Which is a polite way of sayin' that wherever there is gravy there is also grief. Bub"—he eyed the youth narrowly—"ain't you got any folks? No paw or maw? No kin?"

"Wha'd'ye mean?" Buck demanded, bristling. But he averted his gaze under the older man's kindly appraisal. "No, I'm an orphant. Made my own way since I was ten years old back in Alabam'. But that's neither here nor there. I can struggle along, mister. What of it?"

"I was jest thinkin'. If you had a dad, or some one who took interest in you, they might give you a slant on things in general which would be an eye-opener. Now me"—he spoke self-deprecatorily—"I wouldn't loom up in any crowd as a youth's adviser. But I got what you might call a vivid imagination, an' I also have been around a little in my time, here an' there an' yonder. Yeah, an' livin' alone the way I have has give me lots of time to ponder on this an' that——"

"Now listen, you long-whiskered jas-

per," the youth cut in truculently. "If you're gettin' all squared away to give me some advice on the error of my ways, just you get a holt of yoreself an' hang on. Workin' on me with any uplift in mind is my idea of one profitless pastime. I've done placed my bets, an' I shorely aim to leave 'em lay."

"Well," said the other, with mild insistence, "I was just aimin' to ask a question or two concernin' the other side of the picture. For instance, you got any idea what it means to have folks looks at you like you was some kind of poisonous reptile when you showed yore face in public? Which won't be often, you understand, once you've burnt yore bridges. Ever see a woman gather up her kids an' hang onto 'em when you rode by? You got imagination enough to figger what it's like to know the whole world was agin' you—bound round an' round with loneliness that a way, like you was marooned on a rock in a blasted ocean? Yeah, an' if they was a single feller movin' on the horizon, the landscape's plumb crowded, you're that nervous an' suspicious. If they was a price on yore head—which they's bound to be if you don't pass out sudden the first job you tried to pull—would you have nerve enough to ride along the trail, for instance, parleyin' easy with a stranger like me? You got to figger on them things, Buck, me lad."

"I've figgered 'em," stated Buck stubbornly. "I'll give it a whirl. I'm a feller that it's a waste of time to argue with. I got to be shown."

"You mentioned Phoebe a while back. Reg'lar gal, huh?"

"Never mind about Phoebe," growled the youth. "Yeah, she's O. K."

"Phoebe," said the other, "will be one of them many precious things you leave acrost the river after you've burnt yore said bridges. An' that grinnin' lad Shea, who's got his points even if he had yore jacks topped in that poker game, huh? An' Bones, an' the rest of the boys? Don't you savvy what I'm gettin' at, Bub? Time will come, if you carry out yore haywire ideas, that you'd give an arm for the privilege of sinkin' post holes along the line fence in fryin'-pan weather, an' wipe the honest sweat out of yore eyes; an' you'll dream at nights of poundin' the cattle on the tail an' eatin' alkali dust with the rest of the gang when the herd's on the move. When you're squattin' out in the mesquite fryin' a slab of bacon an' eatin' a can of beans you've risked a bullet between the shoulder blades to get, you'll recall that lone hunk of pie which was waitin' for you at the cook shack that night, but it'll bust yore heart to remember what it tasted like; for there'll be no pie for Blitzen Yocum, you understand? Yeah, an' some blasted night when the stars is hangin' low, an' you're squattin' by the coals with yore hand on yore gun, listenin' to far-off noises which might be a posse closin' in, you'll bust down an' howl like a wolf when you remember the chuck-wagon fire when the day's work was done, an' the firelight playin' on the faces of pals an' friends, hombres you know through an' through, who're straight an' squar'—figger *all* them details, Bub?"

"I've figgered 'em," repeated Buck doggedly. "You don't need to preach no more, mister. How you get that way is one of them mysterious things."

"I've been around a little." The other spoke slowly, tugging at his mustache as though the retort had put him at a loss. "I'm a mite older'n you, Bub. Kind of observin' that a way——"

"Well," said Buck, with finality, "let's call it a day an' bend our mighty intellects to less distressin' topics. For instance, hosses. Since you're forkin' a fair-to-middlin' critter yoreself, you're undoubtedly equipped to deal with that subject as thorough as this outlaw business, concernin' which I suspect you ain't so loaded down with information

that you'd sink to yore knees in solid rock."

The older man's mild eyes were fixed on a point ahead, where the base of a moving dust cloud had resolved into a tiny knot of moving objects which were undoubtedly mounted men. A glance at Buck told him that the youth had not yet noted the approaching riders. With deliberation, he fumbled in a hip pocket, produced a black plug of tobacco and tore off a generous chew, so that his leathery cheek bulged.

"I was just about to get to the subject of hosses, Bub," he said softly, with a mirthless grin. "Before you get goin' on this said career of crime you shorely got to acquire a better critter than that there paint."

"Now listen," said Buck, bristling, "this here Baldy hoss is the best li'le ol' cow pony in seven States——"

"Sure, sure," the other soothed. "As a cow pony I'll gamble he's ace high. But to travel the hard trail you're aimin' to undertake, you got to have a hoss with heart an' speed. Now, that there paint's undoubtedly got the heart, but he's too short-barreled an' chunky for the speed you got to have. You got to outrun posses, you understand, an' get quickly from here to yonder. For maybe five seconds in a month yore gun will be the thing you got to depend on. But durin' every minute of the time between it'll have to be yore hoss."

"What you drivin' at?" demanded the youth suspiciously. "You strivin' to do yore noble duty by throwin' more cold water on my plans?"

"No," said the other. "But since you're bound an' determined to burn yore bridges, I aim to help you along. I've been observin' that paint whilst we been conversin'. It's plain he's an easy-ridin' critter, smooth-actin' an' gentle. Now, this black I got don't suit me a-tall. Too fiery an' energetic for my tastes. Plumb paralyzes my arm before the day's over holdin' him back." He patted the animal's arching neck as though in mute apology. "I'll trade you, Bub, even up."

Buck stared in guarded amazement, and with seeming carelessness appraised anew the magnificent black.

"You're jokin', mister," he challenged. "If I'm any judge that critter's blooded."

The older man shook his head. "He's just a catch colt. Maybe he's blooded. I dunno. An' I ain't jokin'. The plain truth of it is, he's too good a hoss for me. That paint is more my style. Under ordinary circumstances, you savvy, I'd shorely have to have plenty boot. But I kind of cotton to you, Bub. I don't hold with yore ideas, but since you're on yore way I'll help you along by startin' you off on a critter that can make the best of 'em eat dust. Kill two birds with one stone, in a manner of speaking." He eyed the youth intently. "You don't have to, of course. Just an idea that done occurred to me."

"It's a trade," said Buck, with exultance, masking his amazement at the realization that the proposal had been made in all seriousness. "It hurts to admit it, but I'm robbin' you blind, mister. When it comes to cow ponies, this here paint's at the head of the list, but that black's a *hoss*."

"It's a trade." The other sealed the bargain. "Let's ease into the clump of junipers yonder an' switch saddles."

Because he was elated at the swift termination of a bargain so obviously in his favor, the suggestion that they should deviate from the trail to effect an exchange of saddles did not at the moment strike Buck as unusual. They turned aside into the small grove of junipers indicated, and his companion swung to the ground.

Whatever doubt the youth had entertained concerning the sincerity of the other's bargain was dispelled by the quickness with which he loosened the girths and swung the saddle aloft. Buck,

too, worked fast, and a moment later, mounting in the stirrups, he felt the thrill of a lover of horseflesh who finds a dynamic and haughty force throbbing beneath his hand.

The other's mild eyes seemed somewhat bleak and tortured as they rode out from the protecting junipers. He glanced once at the questioning black, then looked away. Though his cheek was already bulging, he produced the plug and tore off another chew.

"Look, Bub——" he indicated the approaching horsemen. "Folks headin' this a way."

"Well, I'm danged!" said Buck, in some surprise. "I never noticed 'em before."

"In this outlaw business you got to learn to keep yore eyes peeled." Once more, the speaker's mustache curled in a mirthless grin. "An' that's another thing, Bub. Ever figger what a thrill it'll be to have a posse closin' in on you, every man of 'em hard-ridin' an' hard-shootin', armed with high-powered rifles an' r'arin' to put a bullet between yore shoulder blades? You got imagination enough to figger what a fox thinks about when the blasted hounds are slaverin' at his heels, an' all the tricks he's got to use to make cover—his hide bein' the stake if he places his bets wrong?"

"Sho," said the youth carelessly, "they's nothin' to that. I'd outrun 'em. Wouldn't have to use no tricks if I had a good hoss. Make 'em eat dust, chucklin' as I done so."

"Sometimes," the other pointed out, "a good hoss ain't all of it. Modern inventions is makin' it tough for the outlaw business. Telephones an' telegraph can head a feller off. They're faster than hosses, an' even the foxiest of reptyles once in a while will find himself in a jack pot."

"I'll ford all them creeks when I get to 'em," stated Buck with confidence. "That's a game I shorely crave to play."

"H'm. Well, Bub," the older man said softly, "I wouldn't be surprised but what you had a chance to give it a whirl right now."

"Wha'd'ye mean?"

The other had pulled up, arms resting lazily on the saddle horn, his gaze focused on the approaching horsemen.

"If I'm any judge," he said, "that there's a posse comin'. Ridin' clost together that a way. An' if you look real close you can see their rifle scabbards."

"What of it?" said Buck. "Leave 'em come. We ain't lost any posses."

"Well," said the other slowly, his mild eyes studying the youth, "it gives me an idea. Posses ain't ridin' around in fryin'-pan weather like this 'less they mean business. Right now, they're watchin' us close, just like we're sizin' them up. If I know anything about posses, if you was to make a break for the hills they'd chase you like wildfire. It's a chance for some first-hand experience. An' nothin' to lose—— Begin to get my drift?"

"No," said the youth, puzzled. "I don't get you a-tall. Why should I make a break for the hills?"

"After you've pulled yore first job an' a posse's on yore trail, they'll be after yore scalp," the other pointed out. "When they catch you, you're done. But you ain't burnt no bridges yet. So if you was to make a run for it right now, an' they, bein' hair-trigger gents, was to slope after you muy pronto, you'd get some A-1 experience, huh? If you get away, you could figger you're equipped to be a reg'lar outlaw. If they run you down, they can't hang nothin' on you. You're plain Buck Yocum, lately of the Bell-A, just a lowly cowboy aimin' to struggle along. Do you foller me now?"

"Trompin' on yore heels," said Buck, his boyish features breaking into a grin. "It's a whale of an idea! They mean business, but I'm just pretendin'. It'll likewise give me a chance to turn this

critter loose and see what stuff he's got in him. Mister, I'm on my way. 'Wildcat' Yocum is sprintin' for the tall timber!"

"Wait," said the other. "Start off slow. If they break away from the trail an' spread out, bust into a trot. When they trot, begin to lope. When they lope, make a run for it." He drew out a faded bandanna and wiped his glistening face. His voice quavered with real feeling. "Don't take no chances. I kind of cotton to you, Bub, but our trails fork here. If anything happened to you it'd haunt me. If they corner you, give yoreself up pronto. Don't push that critter too hard. He's a real hoss. Just keep out of rifle shot. Adios, cowboy."

"Pleased to have met up with you, mister." Buck pulled his hat lower over his eyes and tightened the reins. "Yeah, see you again."

The older man clucked to the paint and moved up the trail directly toward the oncoming riders. He was slumped in the saddle, hand listless on the rein, his long mustache drooped motionless athwart his bulging jaw.

The black turned aside at a leisurely walk, headed north. Immediately, new movement was discernible in the group ahead. They milled for a moment, then the bulk of the group likewise left the trail, heading north. They moved at a walk, spreading out a little. Two riders remained on the trail. These bore down on the rider of the paint pony, who, disregarding them, twisted in the saddle to watch.

The black quickened to a trot. The posse, still beyond hailing distance, did likewise. Wider gaps appeared in their ranks as they opened out in skirmish formation. The black's trot became an undulating lope, then exploded suddenly into a headlong run. It was away, reaching out like a greyhound in full flight, the rider bent low in the saddle. The posse spurred forward in a long line, the right and left wings pushing farther east and west. Even at the distance came the faint drumming of their thundering charge. They became wraithlike figures through the swirling dust. The chase was on.

Noting these developments, the rider of the paint pony relaxed and turned his attention to the approaching pair, who were forging toward him at a fast gait. Eying them closely, he shifted his long-barreled weapon farther forward on his thigh.

One of the newcomers was a burly person, with a dusty silver star on the breast of his hickory shirt. The other was gaunt, with a gloomy, sardonic eye. Both were hard of feature, heavily armed, and clothed with authority. It was also obvious that they were truculent, and vastly excited. As they slid to a halt on either side of the paint pony, with a peremptory order to halt, each was looking over his shoulder at the dust of the distant chase.

"Give an account of yoreself, mister," challenged the officer. "I'm Deputy Sheriff Power from Pine City. Where you from? Where you headin' for? Talk fast."

"What's it all about?" queried the mild-mannered one, obviously somewhat appalled by the commotion. "I ain't used to such goings-on. I come from over yonder on Sutter Creek. Aimin' to buy up a few cattle in the Big Bend country. I got more fodder'n I can use this fall, an' aimed to pick up a few feeders——"

"Who's that buzzard you was ridin' with?"

"Met up with him a while back. Seemed like a pleasant enough feller, real person'ble an' easy-going. Kind of a hefty talker, but real good company. Had some funny ideas, though, at that."

"Yeah? What ideas?"

"Well, now,"—the other tugged at his mustache—"I didn't take much stock in his conversation. Figgered maybe he

was joshin'. But he made some brag about bein' a outlaw, kind of a gunman or somethin'——"

"Listen, Hank," cut in the gaunt one restively, "let's leave this simple-minded pilgrim. We got to trail in with that gang to get a cut on the reward money. Let's go."

"Wait, gents," the mild-eyed one blinked up at them pleadingly, "what's all this business, anyway? Shorely to goodness, that feller wasn't a reg'lar outlaw?"

"Brother," said the deputy grimly, yielding to an impulse to impress one so obviously shrinking and inoffensive, "ever hear of the Saline Snake?"

"Yeah, sure. But he ain't circulatin' in these parts, is he?"

"You was ridin' with him a minnit ago. That's him yonder, burnin' up the dust."

"Lawsy!" breathed the other.

"They run him out of Saline County," explained the deputy. "They telephoned to Pine City to head him off. He's headin' for the Gap. You passed up two thousand iron men, brother. County an' State reward money, dead or alive."

"Lawsy!" the mild one repeated, jaw dropping. "But do you figger you can outrun him, mister? He's shorely ridin' a real hoss."

"Sure he's ridin' a good hoss," said the deputy. "But he's cornered. Hasn't got a Chinaman's chance. They's another posse waitin' at the Gap. We'll round him up in the pinnacles. Keep yore eyes peeled, brother. When you see a signal fire burnin' over yonder, you'll know we're callin' the other posses in an' the said Snake won't rattle no more. You can also ponder over them two thousand simoleons that was ridin' right smack alongside of you on the trail."

"You comin' or ain't you?" growled the gaunt one. "Why waste time strivin' to get this benighted citizen's goat? Let's travel."

"Keep yore feet on the ground," the deputy admonished his impatient companion. "That wolf won't be corralled for quite some minutes, or I miss my guess." Nevertheless, he waved a somewhat derisive farewell, chuckling at the mild one's apprehension at the grim events unfolding about him. The pair spurred away toward the tawny, serried ranks of dust rising on the sweltering air.

It was late afternoon. The slanting sunlight was golden on the pillars of the Gap. He of the paint pony rode slowly, hunched in the saddle. His hand was listless on the rein; his mild, unwinking eyes were turned toward the north where, through long moments, the tawny dust of the chase thinned out into a vague amber mist athwart the base of the crumbling mesa.

Motionless on a rocky ridge he stood, leg looped over the saddle horn. Head hanging, the paint pony dozed. The sweltering glare of day was yielding to the majesty of sundown. The incessant buzz of insect life had ceased. Heat mirages no longer shimmered in the tawny distance, and waterless lakes were dry. The harsh bleakness of the desert was mellowing into color harmonies more soft and rich in tone, and from the west a mighty shadow was advancing across the valley floor.

The smoke of the rider's cigarette rose as a thin, blue column on the still air. Upon him was a sense of restraint rather than of repose. Though his eyes, beneath the dusty brim of his sombrero, were fixed upon the far-off crumbling buttresses of the mesa wall, his attitude was that of one who waits, ears straining, for significant sounds.

These came at dusk. It was the sound of gun play, staccato rifle shots muted by intervening miles to frail and tiny echoes. They came intermittently, a thin crackling as of midget warfare, with breathless intervening silences punctured by lone explosions. In fad-

ing silhouette on the rocky ridge the rider listened, tilting his head, and with slow, unhurried deliberation produced tobacco sack and papers. When the sounds ceased, he still waited, his cigarette glowing like a red, somber eye through the gloom.

Night had come in full force when a light twinkled forth from the base of the distant hills. Noting this, the watching rider cast down his cigarette and pulled his hat lower over his eyes. A signal fire would be lighted when the chase was done, the deputy had said, recalling the posse from the Gap. At a tightening of the reins, the paint pony bestirred himself. But the weary animal did not proceed toward the Gap. At the behest of his rider, his plodding course bore upon that point in the base of the frowning rampart where a light had gleamed like a fallen star.

The Pine City posse squatted around a mesquite fire on the sandy slope below the crumbling moraine. Cigarettes sloped from grinning lips. The firelight played on complacent features and was reflected as smoldering coals in the eyes of men still caught up in the savage, primitive thrill of the greatest of all chases—when a renegade of the species has led the way.

A little apart, their prisoner sat cross-legged, head bowed, his manacled hands listless between his knees. Beyond the circle of light the hobbled horses munched in the gloom. With their quarry run to earth, an exultant council had decided that inasmuch as horses and men were weary and Pine City was almost a day's ride distant, camp would be made for the night. This would also permit the posse from the Gap to join them at the signal fire and swell the triumphant forces that would escort the outlaw in.

The man hunt was done. To Buck Yocum, during the interval extending from the moment he had quitted the mild-mannered stranger to that welcome instant when the irons in the shaking hands of the deputy had clamped upon his wrists, deep and abiding experience had come. It had been a matter of hours only, yet in that crowded interval worlds had crashed about him. He was no longer Blitzen Yocum, or Wildcat Yocum, who purposed to blaze a trail in the Big Bend country. That fire-spitting pilgrim of imagination already was as a childish phantasy from a past life infinitely remote; Buck was, in spirit, merely a lonely and bewildered cowboy bound round by hostile circumstances and far from home.

There had been a brief thrill when the splendid horse had reached out like a greyhound in full flight. It had been very brief. Looking over his shoulder as he ran, a thrill of a different order had shaken him. In that long line of thundering horses to the rear had been no faintest suggestion of make-believe. There had been something grim and implacable in the poise of the riders, bending low over their animals' necks, sombreros flattened against the wind. Hands had stolen toward rifle scabbards; weapons brandished aloft, held clear of plunging horses, had glinted dully in the slanting sunlight. In that moment came Buck's first cold knowledge of the dimensions of this thing he had undertaken so lightly: back on the trail, he had envisioned it as a glorified game of hide-and-seek, but to those grim horsemen he was still a dangerous outlaw, to be taken dead or alive whatever the cost.

Under the impact of this realization, he had clapped spurs to the black. The animal had immediately widened the gap between himself and his pursuers. Momentarily, a measure of Buck's old self-confidence had returned. Grim though the pursuit might be, his mount's speed was that of wings. Recalling the advice given by his mild-mannered com-

panion, he conserved the animal's resources, remaining beyond rifle shot.

His second shock had come at sundown, when he realized suddenly the towering and savage dimensions of the mesa ahead. Looking back at his pursuers, a sinister question presented itself. He was unfamiliar with the nature of the terrain to the north. From a distance, the skyline of the mesa had seemed irregular and broken, pierced by gorges and canyons. Now it seemed to have risen rampart by rampart from the sands of the valley floor. There were mighty clefts in the wall, but these rose sharply to merge into yet other rough-hewn, shadowy walls beyond. In the rear, the posse, rifle shot apart, had deployed into a skirmish line that was miles in length. Was it possible that they were gloating over knowledge that he did not possess, namely, that the barrier ahead was impassable and unscalable, and that he was entrapped?

He had swung to the right, and instantly the left wing of the posse had closed in. The right wing, the last rider tiny in the distance, had forged ahead to cut him off. He had reversed his direction. They on the right changed their course with him. It was too late now, he saw, to escape to right or left. Even the resources of his splendid black were insufficient, for at the angle of flight required at this stage of the game, he must cover almost two yards to his pursuers' one; and meanwhile, as he scurried back and forth like a jack rabbit doubling vainly before the hounds, the center of the column was closing in.

In sheer desperation, therefore, he had plunged headlong upon the barrier; and after a nightmare interval during which the sound of his progress reechoed harshly from the thunder-built walls of the gorge, and his iron-souled black could go no farther up the crumbling moraine, he had quitted the saddle. With his breath whistling between his clenched teeth, he had scrambled over huge boulders, fallen, and risen again, extricated himself from viselike apertures that tore his clothing and lacerated his flesh, mounting higher while his legs grew weak, his heart pounded suffocatingly against his ribs, and the exultant yells of his pursuers, choking the gap at his back, had sent him into new paroxysms of frenzied effort.

Here had come the last stage in the game whose stakes, Buck now realized, were Death. Beyond a vast débris of giant boulders and drifts of crumbled basalt, he saw the end of his desperate trail. A sheer wall was ahead. He could go no farther. As he dashed the sweat from his eyes and peered about him like an insect in a stone-walled room whose ceiling was the sky, he heard, for the first time in his youthful experience, the unforgettable sound of a high-powered bullet passing within inches of his body.

Out of the chaos below it came, puncturing the air like the lash of a venomous whip. It spattered upon the face of a boulder less than arm's length away with a peculiarly vicious impact, ricocheted higher upon the wall, and the fragments buzzed like angry bees into the distance. Hard on its heels the report of the rifle crashed in the depths, the staccato echoes reverberating in the canyon.

As he shrank, cowering, another bullet spat against the wall above his head, and another. He plunged down into the shelter of the huge boulder, and lay prone.

On other occasions, in that past life that was already remote, Buck had heard the whine of rifle bullets. He had never before been their target. As they hissed and spat about him during a crashing fusillade, each seemingly possessed of an inexpressibly malignant and spiteful personality, new and sinister vistas opened to him, elemental truths that shook him to the depths. Men were

operating the rifles that belched those unseen messengers of death upon him, men of his own kind who had thrown aside the social compact in the guise of law, and their hands were turned against him as they would band together against a slavering coyote. Only because he had been a too-distant target for certain aim, his life thus far had been spared. "Dead or alive" was the authority vested in them. Because they were hardened men, and the outlaw they deemed him to be was beyond the pale, they would take him alive, if convenient; dead, if possible.

It had seemed so simple back yonder on the trail when the posse had approached. If captured, he would give himself up. Now, as the bullets lashed about him and he strove to wedge himself into a yet smaller space against the base of the protecting boulder, he faced the shuddering realization that even this pitiful gesture might be denied him.

By the slender chance that there happened to be present, among the hard-bitten posse whose thirst for action was here given full sway, a representative of the law in the person of the deputy sheriff, there had come a lull in the rifle fire, and a voice from the gorge hailed the besieged.

"Hey, you slinkin' polecat," this one had challenged, "ready to give yoreself up an' come out of it peac'ble? Or you crave to be dragged out by the heels? We got you cornered so you ain't got a Chinaman's chance, but don't you be sociable 'less you feel that a way. Talk fast, now. The boys are restless."

"I'm givin' myself up." Buck's hurried reply had been hoarse and quavering.

A momentary silence had greeted this statement, followed by a hurried consultation in the depths. Then the voice of the deputy had come again, obviously more than tinged with regret.

"Over the rock with yore artillery. Up with yore hands, an' foller 'em slow. All right, slide out, hombre, an' no funny moves on account of these wolves rarin' to let daylight through yore mangy hide."

Buck had complied, trembling, and in the gloom of the gorge he could plainly see the round, unwavering muzzles of numerous rifles, in the hands of men who could decapitate a rattlesnake at thirty paces offhand, trained upon his breast. Under this protection, the deputy had approached him gingerly, as one approaches a poisonous reptile, and snapped handcuffs upon his wrists. In his visions of outlawry, Buck had never dreamed that the touch of steel could be so reassuring.

At this point began a new chapter in Buck's experience that dwarfed, in psychological effect, even the ghastly moments that had preceded it. His pursuit and capture had represented a lurid interval because his frenzy of desperation had been rooted in the primitive and unreasoning instinct of self-preservation. But what he now encountered struck deep at the heart of all his preconceived notion of reasonable things.

In a revulsion of feeling that left him shaken and trembling, he had looked about the circle of captors, grinning. He had licked his lips and found chuckling words to recount the nature of the practical joke that had been played upon them: how he, Buck Yocum, was not the outlaw they presumed him to be, but a lowly cowboy lately from the Bell-A: how he had sprinted away from them in the flats merely to try out the speed of his horse, which he had acquired in a casual horse-trade on the way toward the Gap; and as he had looked about him at the grim, silent circle the eager words stammered on his lips, his grin became fixed and his voice trailed away.

Though he did not realize it, nor had he analyzed it, Buck's personality had always, throughout his youthful career, encountered a reaction from his fellow

men that had been so universal that he knew no other. Being ingenuous of countenance and boyish of manner despite his stern assumption of maturity, the stern eyes of older men invariably softened into a species of paternal tolerance in his presence, as had the mild-mannered one in the flats; youths of his own age warmed to him instantly, and women smiled upon him. As a fact of nature, he had assumed this to be the way of a friendly world and had resented it keenly on those occasions when he had sought to be scowlingly impressive.

But now, in the deepening gloom of the canyon, the hard faces about him had expressed less than disbelief. There had been no answering smiles, no slightest indication that he spoke a known tongue. They had merely stared at him stonily, rifles sloping from motionless arms; and an exceedingly gaunt and lugubrious person, apparently the right-hand man of the deputy, had terminated the monologue by jerking a sardonic thumb toward the flats.

He had stumbled down the deepening twilight of the gorge, falling because of his manacled hands and being jerked roughly again to his feet. When he walked slowly, the toe of a ruthless boot had prodded him from the rear.

"Hank," a grim-lipped old-timer had suggested yearningly to the deputy, "from what they say over in the Saline country, we shorely ain't doin' society no service. What say we overpower you, thereby savin' yore face, an' string this buzzard up to the nearest juniper? He's so blasted slippery he's liable to make his get-away before the Courts get a chance at him."

"But I ain't the Snake!" Buck had protested, perspiration bursting out anew on his face, "I ain't done nothin' wrong. I can prove it, if you'll leave me get back to the Bell-A."

It was noticeable that the deputy's reply was directed to the old-timer.

"Nothin' doing, Tex," he admonished. "Curb them bloodthirsty instincts. Wait till we light a fire an' fetch the sheriff an' them other lads back from the Gap. He won't make no get-away. To-morrow morning we'll turn him over to the tender mercies of them Saline sharps. They'd be off Pine City for life if they learned we took this sidewinder alive an' didn't give them a chance to lay hands on him."

It had been obvious, too, that the splendid black, held in the gloom below by a restive and cursing member of the posse previously designated for that duty, was the target of as much curiosity as the prisoner himself. The ruthless ones gathered around the magnificent horse in profane and guarded praise that was tribute from lovers of horseflesh.

Camp was made on the mesquite slope. The signal fire was lighted. Two riders, mounted on the freshest of the available horses, were dispatched to Pine City to inform the Saline County officials that the man hunt was finished. The manacled prisoner was left seated a little apart, while the chuckling group passed in review the triumphant record of the preceding hours.

It was close to midnight when the reinforcements arrived from the Gap. Once more a circle of curious faces hemmed Buck in, thumbs hooked in belts, as the deputy and his men retold the circumstances of his capture. With the utmost frankness he was scrutinized and discussed, while he glowered back lugubriously. The sheriff of Pine County was among the newcomers, a small, waspish man with black, menacing eyes; and to him Buck made a last appeal. But the twisted grins that greeted his protestations and the sheriff's sardonic reply caused him to shrink anew within himself.

"Ridin' a paint when you met up with this feller, was you?" questioned the officer dryly. "Changed hosses out in

the flats an' Hank here watchin' you through the glasses all the while, huh? Yeah, right out in the open where Hank could have seen you change yore shirt! An' when the boys come close, you sprinted for the hills just to try out this new hoss which you done acquired in such a hurry, is that it? H'm. You ain't so slick, hombre. Tell that yarn to them Saline lads when they come slopin' in."

"But we didn't change saddles out in the open," Buck protested. "We pulled up in a grove of junipers."

"Bah!" said the deputy irritably. "We seen you all the while. You rode right through them junipers."

"Hank," said the sheriff, "you done well takin' this pilgrim without no bloodshed. An' him makin' his brags about passin' out with his boots on. But like most polecats of his stripe, he caved in at the show-down. Let's give that black the once-over. I'm plumb curious about the critter. Heard more about that hoss' earmarks than this buzzard here, who don't show his face often in polite society. Which he probably won't again," he added, "for some considerable spell."

The newcomers, accompanied by the deputy, moved off in the gloom to the point where the saddle horses, including the black, had wandered farther afield.

At dawn the sheriff of Saline County, a burly, booming man, rode into the slumbering camp.

"Rise up, bullsnakes," roared that official genially. "It's daylight in the swamps. I understand you hard-boiled Pine City wildcats have got a li'le pet staked out which Saline County's plumb pleased to take off yore hands. Lead us to him, citizens."

The men circled about the embers of the fire heaved up stiffly, yawning. They clambered to their feet, rubbing the sleep from their eyes, stretching and flailing their arms.

"Met up with yore lads last night," the Saline official explained. "When they told me you'd done corralled this hombre whom we're r'arin' to introduce to the said Halls of Justice, I rode right out here pronto. Don't aim to take no more chances with that slippery sidewinder. Figgered he might slide out on you before I got hands on 'im. Sheriff, where's he at?"

The little Pine County officer pointed significantly at a bulging blanket from beneath which the prisoner's manacled hands projected.

"Sleepin', is he?" grinned the bulky one. "He's that hard-boiled. Let's present our excuses for disturbin' him that a way an' wake the polecat up."

He swung down from his horse and approached the sleeping one.

To enjoy to the utmost the dramatic moment, when the notorious outlaw should rouse up to face his ancient enemy, the entire group gathered in an expectant circle, jostling for points of vantage. Complacence was written large on the leathery face of the little Pine County sheriff. Hank, his deputy, who had led the assault resulting in the outlaw's capture, beamed. Even the melancholy features of the deputy's gaunt crony were split into a facial contortion that might have been a grin. All stood, rocking on their heels, thumbs hooked in belts, as the genial Saline County official, making a pretense of pushing back his shirt sleeves like a magician before his greatest act, laid hold on the blanket with a fastidious thumb and forefinger and pulled it back.

Thus were revealed boyish features whose expression, even in the sleep of exhaustion, was singularly lugubrious. The prisoner's tousled head was pillowed on his arm. His flushed and grimy cheeks seemed almost swollen and tear-stained, and the corners of his mouth drooped forlornly. Even to cynical, callous eyes, in the half light of dawn, it was more than faintly suggested that

this was no notorious outlaw whose resourcefulness and ironlike qualities had enabled him successfully to elude the skilled man-hunters of a hard region, no fire-spitting monster habitually engaged in the business of blazing a ruthless trail, but merely a lowly cowboy whom hostile circumstances had hurled far from home and here had paused to rest.

As the sheriff of Saline County stared down, eyes bulging, the grin frozen on his face, the sleeping one muttered drowsily like one wrestling with disordered dreams.

"Jehoshaphat!" breathed the bulky official. His pointing finger quivered. "This ain't the Snake!"

The others stared back in the stupefied amazement of men whose minds refuse to grasp a statement contrary to an already accepted certainty. They peered at each other, and shook their heads.

"This rosy-cheeked bozo ain't the Snake." The bulky one insisted harshly, prodding the sleeper with his toe. "What you hombres tryin' to pull, anyway? If it's a joke, let's all laugh together. Don't tell me you been burnin' up the dust roundin' up *this* stall-fed yearlin'!"

The prisoner roused at this point, and with a convulsive effort reared to a sitting position. He raised both manacled fists and rubbed his eyes. He exhibited no surprise at the fact that again an intent circle hemmed him in. His melancholy glance roved about the group and his shoulders hunched apathetically. But as he became aware of the trend of the wrathful discourse, hope dawned in his jaundiced eye.

"Mister," questioned the deputy in a hoarse voice, "if he ain't the Snake, who in blazes is he?"

"How should I know?" demanded the Saline official. "I got no brand on 'im. The polecat we want is older than this lad. Kind of a mournful-lookin' critter who would shoot out yore eyeteeth, weepin' as he done so. He's ridin' a black hoss you could pick amongst a thousand. A thoroughbred built like a blasted greyhound. How the Sam Hill did you get snarled up this a way?"

"If this maverick ain't mournful-lookin', I ain't entitled to credit," challenged the deputy. "An' if his hoss don't fill the bill I'll eat the critter, hide an' all."

"Where's the hoss?"

"Grazin' out yonder," said the deputy. He turned to point, arm extended; but as he turned himself about, studying each of the hobbled horses on the slope, his arm lowered slowly. The black was nowhere in sight.

While the bulky sheriff leered sardonically, the group spread apart, moving forward to gain an unobstructed view. Thus, simultaneously, each became aware of an astounding fact. The black was gone; but in its place, likewise hobbled and grazing contentedly among its fellows, was a sturdy paint pony.

From their prisoner came a joyful cry.

"There's my paint," he exulted. "Whoop-e-e! Good ol' Baldy." He emitted a shrill, quavering whistle, and the distant paint, flinging up its head, nickered in reply.

"What's it all about?" demanded the Saline sheriff, with the patience of one dealing with subnormal intellects. "You claim you got the Snake, an' he turns out to be this fuzz-faced citizen. You claim you got the Snake's hoss, an' thar's that pot-bellied paint. Take yore time now, gents, and if you got amongst you some feller who can stand up under the white man's burden, let's have the low-down on this deal."

"Hank," the Pine County sheriff instructed his deputy, his black eyes snapping, "tell this Saline peace officer, who's spent a year tryin' to round up this pet bullsnake of his, how come we lost out the only time we had a chance

to show him how to run his own business. Yeah, an' him givin' us the description of the hoss to work on instead of the crook. Joe," he instructed a youth in the group, "go get that paint an' fetch him in. All right, Hank, spill it."

But the disgruntled deputy jerked a thumb at their prisoner.

"Leave him tell it," he growled. "I'm so bogged down in the coils of error I ain't even sure he's the same lobo we rounded up. Feller, give us that song an' dance you undertook to pull on us last night."

Buck told his story again, omitting only the philosophical argument that had preceded the exchange of horses, deeming this a closed chapter of too personal a nature to be revealed. He naïvely admitted his wonder that the mild-mannered one should have consented to a horse trade so obviously one-sided in point of values, and described the quickness with which they had exchanged saddles in the shelter of the junipers.

When he had finished the narrative, explaining that he had fled at the suggestion of the stranger and had had no opportunity of giving himself up once the pursuit was under way, he was questioned closely by the Saline sheriff concerning the Bell-A and the appearance of the mild-mannered one. Upon his description of the stranger, the bulky official spread his hands and shrugged his shoulders in an eloquent gesture; and the gaunt member of the posse approached his crony, the deputy, removed his hat, and cast it on the ground.

"Jump on it, Hank," he begged, in gloomy remorse, "it'll make me feel better that a way. The kid's tellin' the truth. He was tellin' the truth all the while. An' you an' me was so r'arin' to get in on the reward money that we didn't stop to question that buzzard. Particularly me, who drug you away before you was done talkin'."

"Reward money!" sneered the deputy bitterly. "Old hoss, you didn't make no such spectacle of yoreself as me. I actually kidded that bozo for losin' out on that reward money himself! An' the poker-faced maverick never cracked a smile. No, no, mister. You an' me had best keep our hats where they belong. It'll make folks think we're equipped with heads that a way."

"Hank," the sheriff of Pine County directed, "take the irons off this lowly pilgrim. Son, we ain't apologizin' none for runnin' you down an' takin' pot shots at you an' keepin' you prisoner overnight, on account of you bustin' up as fine a trap as was ever laid for a gun-totin' desperado. If you wasn't so downcast an' innocent that a way, like a blasted calf that's all snarled up in barb' wire, I'd hold you for aidin' an' abettin' a criminal. As it is, you can take that blasted paint an' burn up the dust to whatever activities yore fancy dictates. Now, what in time you lookin' so pop-eyed about?" He questioned irascibly, for back of the vast relief and awe in the youth's gaze as he rubbed his chafed wrists and peered about him was more than a suggestion of dazed bewilderment.

"Well," Buck admitted, "maybe I'm dumb, but I ain't got it all figgered yet. How come I got my ol' paint pony back? What happened to that black critter? Not that I want him back, you understand," he added hastily. "I've shorely changed my mind some about that hoss trade. I was just wonderin'."

"It'll be my pleasure an' privilege to answer that question, young feller," said the Saline sheriff with grim relish. "These enterprisin' an' trustin' citizens didn't post no guard on the camp last night——"

"Why post a guard?" interrupted the Pine County peace officer, bristling. "It wasn't necessary nor even reasonable, assumin' this rosy-cheeked hoss trader was the said Snake. We're out in the

desert where he couldn't have walked nowhere. Ironed that a way, he couldn't have taken no hoss an' made a run for it. Don't you try to tell us we slipped up on that particular detail."

"Not postin' no guard," continued the bulky one, his joviality returning under his fellow-officer's wrathful chagrin, "it was a simple matter for a hombre as nervy as the said Snake, an' who's also got the habit of takin' advantage of any an' all circumstances which will better his hand, to slide up to his critter in the bowels of the night, leave the paint, an' make tracks on a reg'lar hoss, chucklin' as he done so—but not too loud on account of maybe he'd disturb the snorin' of these hard-workin' an' hopeful sleuths."

"Yeah, an' if you'd given us a description of the Snake when you telephoned us he was headin' for Pine City," retorted the little sheriff, "tellin' us he was a long-whiskered bozo with a face like a deacon instead of confinin' all yore eloquence to describin' his hoss, Hank here would never have left him get by, I would have waited at the Gap to head him off, an' we'd have had him bottled up in the flats accordin' to Hoyle."

"Pretty thin, mister," the other jeered. "Every one in this end of the desert is supposed to know what the Snake looked like."

"He ain't known here," snapped the little man. "Crooks like him don't thrive in Pine County. It's only when polecats come slopin' down from Saline that we waste time sleuthin' an' breath-arguin'."

The long-standing animosity existing between the two desert towns might have reached a more heated stage under these reprisals except that Buck's next question revealed that the bewildered youth had not yet grasped the crux of the situation.

"Well, but I don't see," he said, scratching his head, "how this Snake hombre got in on the deal. How'd he get a hold of my paint? How come, if he was out in the flats all the while, that none of us ever seen him?"

An astonished silence, followed by roars of laughter, overwhelmed him. All about him men slapped their knees, convulsed. The bulky sheriff howled with glee, holding his sides. Even the waspish Pine County officer relaxed a little, his black eyes glittering.

"Don't tell me, cowboy," pleaded the bulky one, wiping his eyes, "that you don't know *yet* who you was ridin' with yesterday an' with whom you made that A-1 hoss trade?"

Before Buck's dazed mental machinery could analyze the significance of this query, the member of the posse previously dispatched to bring in the paint pony loped up in a state of some excitement, waving a shred of wrapping paper aloft.

"Here's a note," he announced, "braided into the critter's mane."

He gave it to the little sheriff, who, having perused it, read its contents aloud. To the assembled posse and to the sheriff of Saline County it meant little more than a gesture from a resourceful desperado who, having won on the last deal, thus waved a jaunty farewell. But to Buck the simple words, slowly enunciated, were staggering.

The note read:

BUB: When you read this, I'm slopin' through the Gap. Give my respects to the posse. Don't hold no hard feelin's, son. Tradin' hosses was my only chance to get by them near-sighted wolves. Since I'm certain for sure you're ready to trade back, I'm doin' so an' you can figger the experience as boot. Remember me to Bones an' that grinnin' lad Shea; an' when you're old as me an' ain't eatin' the dust of bitter trails, you an' Phoebe will both agree that yore luckiest day was out in the blisterin' flats when you crossed the trail of the well-wishin' gent whom folks call THE SALINE SNAKE.

"What's all this Phoebe an' Bones business?" demanded the little sheriff. "Who's Shea?"

"Those were folks we were talking about before we met up with the deputy," said Buck, in an awed voice. "Gosh, mister, that soft-spoken an' easy-goin' feller who listened to my hard-boiled talk was the Snake himself! He was goin' to make me trade hosses when he rode up, but I talked so blasted much he left me do it of my own free will, an' kidded me into runnin' like blazes when the posse showed up! I figgered he was a two-by-four rancher who'd never been nowhere nor seen nothin', an' I was the gent who had the world by the tail; an' all the while he was the most dangerous crook who ever lit in these parts! Yeah, gave me good advice, he did, an' meant it, too—an' me figgerin' he didn't know what he was talkin' about! Son of a gun," he breathed, in a burst of feeling that convulsed his listeners anew, "I'm the dumbest horned toad that ever undertook to howl like a wolf!"

"Now, now," chuckled the bulky sheriff, leering at his waspish rival, "you're takin' in too much territory, cowboy. This landscape's plumb crowded with similar well-meanin' citizens. But I don't aim to make a point of it," he added hastily. "What was this said advice the Snake donated?"

The youth flushed, hung his head, and dug the toe of his boot into the dust.

"Well," he evaded, "I—I was kind of figgerin' on goin' up to the Big Bend country an'—an' undertakin' a new line of work. But he told me I'd best stick to my old stampin' grounds, where I had friends that a way, an'—an' knew what it was all about——"

"Why waste time doin' any more heavy ponderin' over this Saline crook?" cut in the little sheriff. "It's going to be frying-pan weather before we hit Pine City. Let's go."

Dust from the milling horses rose on the breathless desert. Men mounting into the saddle cast long, wavering shadows across the valley floor. The bulky deputy paused to put a careless question.

"Which way, Yocum? East toward the Gap?"

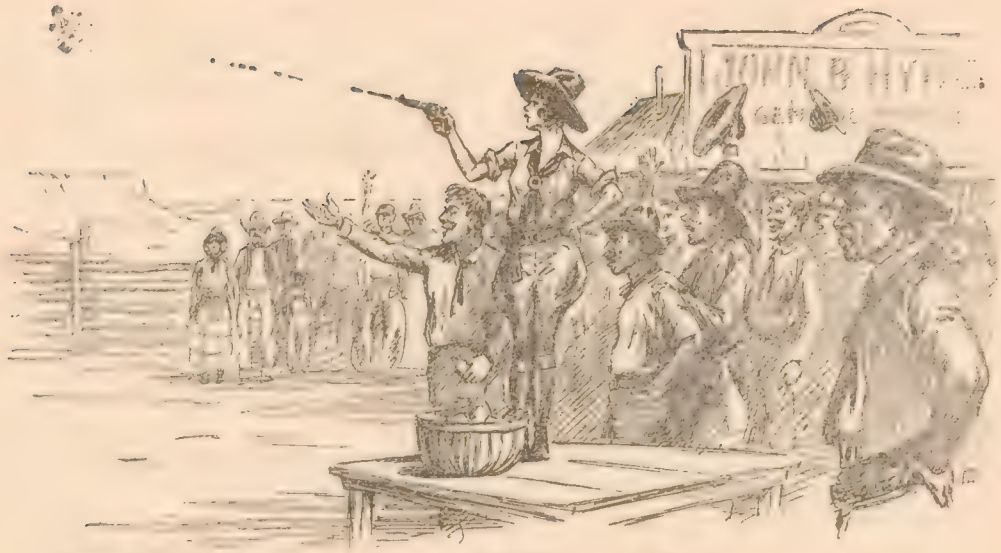
"No," said Buck, blinking like one who peers into the strengthening light of a new and significant dawn, "West —toward the Bell-A."

COLLEGE GRADUATES FOR INDIAN FARMS

A NEW and interesting step has recently been taken by the government to encourage Indians in farms and farming. This assistance has taken the form of an appropriation to pay agricultural college graduates for work on government Indian reservations. H. B. Pearls, of the Indian Bureau, believes that this new departure in the administration of Indian affairs will be of great service to the bureau in obtaining coöperation from the State agricultural schools and colleges.

"County agents and agricultural extension workers have always felt that their work in a county should stop as soon as they came to the boundary line of an Indian reservation," Mr. Pearls says, "feeling, no doubt, that this was government property and that hands-off was the best policy."

The appropriation for the work totals twenty-five thousand dollars. Officials at the bureau say that, while this amount will serve only to obtain a few men to direct the work of the Indians, it will further coöperation with established farm bureaus and sources of information.



Trigger Trailers

By George Gilbert

Author of "West of the West," etc.

CHAPTER I.

WHO WILL WIN?

"WHO will win the all-'round shootin' match?"

The men whose chairs were propped against the front of the Golden Horn began to discuss this all-absorbing topic avidly. It was a hot afternoon. The horses at the racks up and down the street hung their heads low, some of them even had them under the thin tie-rails for the sake of the narrow ribbon of shade thus obtained.

"I'm bettin' on Claus Winston," one old-timer offered.

"Well, he's fast and sure," another admitted,

"With the six-gun he might hold up, but put a rifle in his paw and he's not quite up with Hardy Thames," a third put in.

"Conditions make it an all-'round match," the first speaker reminded them; "all sorts of targets, shootin' from afoot and hossback."

"I think Rockin' R will take the can-rollin' test," the second speaker guessed or predicted, as the case might turn out.

"But that's only one event," another reminded them. "Those Rockin' R boys make a hobby of shooting cans along the ground every time they come into or quit town, just t' make a joyful noise, but that don't signify they can do any real fancy shootin' like some of these events call for."

"Still, a good can-roller can generally knock over a coyote on the run from saddle."

"They ain't goin' t' be any coyotes shot at in this contest," one of the debaters put in with a chuckle.

"We'll know more about it in a couple of days, when the match is over; till then talk's cheap. I'm for Thames," a defender insisted.

"And I'm for Winston, fifty dollars'

worth," the first man to pick a favorite came back with, producing some bills, which were eagerly taken in wager.

"Don't bet too much on me; yo' might lose it," a drawling voice warned from the outer circle of onlookers.

"That's good advice," a sharper voice came from the opposite side of the crowd. By now the loungers had left their chairs and were standing in a knot before the hotel, partly blocking the narrow board sidewalk.

At once the talk ceased, as if a cold wind had blown across the crowd.

"The contest will tell that, Thames," the first objector went on in his low, easy drawl.

"We might settle it some other way, Winston."

"We might, but I'm not lookin' for any fight. I've told yo' that a lot of times, Thames. Loose fightin' or talk never got a man anything."

"Pah!" Hardy shot from tense lips. He was rocking back and forth from heel to toe of his cowboy boots, and at every rocking motion the spurs at his heels tinkled and the big belt to which his long guns were holstered creaked a bit. The guns rode high and their butts were turned to the front. He was darkly handsome, lean, with a straight line over his upper lip, penciled with silky hair waxed out to points sharp enough to fit into the eye of a needle. His hands were long, nervous, strong.

Winston did not reply to this sour note. Instead, he leaned against a gallery post with one shoulder, put his hands into his trousers pockets, and began to whistle with exasperating slowness and clearness, his whistle cutting into the ensuing silence like the probe of a knife. He had no gun in sight and his blue eyes were serene. He was tall, as was Thames, but he was narrower across the shoulders. His hat was well back on his head and his very light hair strayed from under the brim in rumpled plenty. Hardy's boots were under his trousers, the pants legs being rolled up almost to their tops. Winston's trousers were stuffed into his boots and each boot was marked with a Lone Star, embroidered in white-silk thread, in front, near the top. His whistle continued as Thames stared insolently at him.

"If yo' had a gun——" Thames began, pressing for a fight again.

"But I've none," said Winston quietly.

"It's hangin' on the horn of yo're saddle, down below two doors," Thames insisted.

"And that's whe'e it'll stay, Thames." Winston began to whistle.

"Shut that wail off," Thames ordered sharply.

"Why, if it wears on yo'r tattered nerves, all right," and Winston was silent.

"Who said my nerves were weak?"

"I didn't; I said they we'e tattered," said Winston coolly, and he began to whistle again.

The crowd tittered.

"Yo're yallow."

"It took more than a yallow man t' go get that holdup out of the woodshed when he was holed up with a rifle and two six-guns, and ever' one else was content with long-range work," some one reminded Thames. "Claus rushed him, jumped into the window, and drug him out, bare-handed."

Thames had no reply to this rebuke. He could see that he was losing ground with the crowd. He started to shoulder his way out of the press toward his lanky bay at the tie rack. As he did so, hoofbeats sounded at the far end of the town and two riders came into view.

"That's 'Old' Brisette from Cow Thief," some one warned. "That sure is Old Duke Brisette in person."

"Who is that with him?"

"Maybe one of his gunmen."

The crowd watched the two ride in. The bearded cattleman, hardly swaying in his big "rocking-chair" saddle,

glanced to right and left; his slender companion looked straight ahead.

"It's a girl," Claus Winston informed them.

"I never heard of a girl with that crowd over on Cow Thief," Thames remarked.

She was tall, slender, with a double braid of tawny hair down her straight back, and her gray-serge divided skirt flared wide. A knot of red ribbon fluttered at her throat, where her soft flannel collar was wide-rolled back to show a V of softer tan than her face wore.

The two riders were mounted on horses fit to make a man yearn for their possession. They were built for speed and endurance on the long trails. Each was a very dark gray, with cloudlike dapplings—each a horse that would not show up sharp and clear against a neutral background.

They drew rein before the Golden Horn.

"Go do yo'r tradin', Lucille," Old Brisette ordered; "buy plenty and don't spare. I'll be right he'e when yo' get back. Hunkers' place is right across the way."

The girl, without a glance at the crowd, kneed her horse around and started for the general store across from the hotel. Old Brisette swung down slowly, tossed the bridle reins over the tie rail, slapped the dappled horse with rough affection on the neck, and started for the hotel. Men made way for him. He stopped before one of the posts that upheld the gallery and glanced keenly at the bill describing the coming shooting match. He read it slowly, stubby forefinger lingering over hard words, and his big lips moved as he spelled some of them over a second or even a third time, nodding his head and squinting as if it were a mighty effort for him to puzzle it all out. Then he turned to the crowd.

"Reg'lar he-man time, eh, boys?"

"Sure! Goin' t' send an entry?" Thames asked. He had left his horse to come back and watch Brisette read the bill of events.

"I might. I see it says on the bottom, 'No questions asked; all friendly for that day.'"

"Yes; no grudges held for that one day. Any one can come in."

"Some of my boys are 'short' in this man's town." Brisette's keen blue eyes were appraising them all.

"That don't signify the day of the shootin' match," Claus Winston spoke up, "the committee got Sheriff Cadwold's word on it. Every one come and fotch the dawgs and babies and be easy. We're all neighbors that one day."

"I think my boys are put onto more than they deserve," Old Brisette complained, owling at them all from under his big, bushy brows; "they're good boys, if they're let alone."

"No one offered any remarks against them," Thames put in.

Old Brisette whirled on him with a surprising quickness that disconcerted Thames not a little.

"They'd better not, and yo' least of all. A lot of this talk about my boys comes from yo', Thames."

Thames did not reply to this direct challenge. Intsead, he looked away uneasily. No one made a sound suggesting levity now. Old Brisette's reputation for badness was too well established for men to trifle with him.

"We'll be in, with my crowd, t' shoot," Brisette spoke up sharply; "relyin' on that invite, 'No questions asked; all friendly for that day.'"

"It holds," a burly, broad-faced man announced, from the edge of the group. Several greeted him with, "Hello, sheriff."

"Make it all the more interesting, then," Brisette laughed, mollified at once. "All right, Cadwold; we'll be with yo', and tell all the boys t' shoot hard and straight, or we'll take off all the honors. I've got an entry for the

fancy shootin' that will make yo'r ha'r fairly curl."

"Put his name down on this entry card," Cadwold invited, handing the old-timer an official ticket of entry.

Brisette took the card, produced a pencil stub, and laboriously filled out the card, entering several names for each event. When he got to the line reading, "Fancy shooting events," he chuckled and entered, "Frank Brisette." He handed the card to Cadwold, who glanced at it, and asked:

"Who is this lad, Frank?"

"New hand; kin of my third cousin. Just joined us."

"Is he good?"

"We'll fotch money to bet, and that's whatever."

The girl now appeared before the store across the street. She tied a gunny bag behind her cantle with quick knots, proving her skill at that work. She swung up and rode across the street rather than walk, in true range fashion. Old Brisette called to her:

"I'll be out in a minute, Lucy; want some eatin' terbac."

The girl sat quietly in the saddle, self-possessed, although she could feel the gaze of two dozen pairs of masculine eyes appraisingly upon her. Thames lounged through the gathering and spoke to her teasingly:

"I didn't know that they had a girl over on Cow Thief."

"Something else yo' don't know," she said quietly.

"What's that?"

"Manners," very distinctly.

Thames flushed and drew back as if slapped across the face.

Old Brisette came out, chewing away with vigor. He gave his gray a bit of red fine cut in passing and then swung to the saddle with an ease surprising in one so old.

"Come on, Lucy," he said, "let's get out of this man's town; a town always smells bad t' me, after the open range."

He rode with his right hand well up, elbows out. His long beard blew back around the corner of his big shoulders.

"Darned old cow thief!" Thames heatedly jerked out.

A silence followed this outburst.

"If all that's done down on their place was on record, a lot would be explained," Thames insisted.

"That may be so, but the time t' say it was when Brisette was with us," Claus Winston drawled.

Like a flash, Thames whirled, hand snapping to his right-hand gun. It came over and Winston kicked, leaping in like a panther. The toe of his boot caught the right wrist of Thames and the gun shot wild. Thames' numbed hand dropped the gun. He reached for the other one, to feel the impact of a big balled fist under his ear.

After a time Thames looked up at the awning over the gallery before the Golden Horn. He was on his back. Over him was Winston, who dropped ten cartridges down into Thames' hat, that lay beside him.

"Yo'r guns are beside yo'; I took the shells out of them," Winston remarked quietly. "That let's yo' out, for this time."

"I'd go easy on that gun-throwin' stuff," Cadwold spoke up sharply; "especially on men that ain't got guns on them."

Thames got up, took up the shells and guns, and walked to his horse. As he mounted he left this threat behind him:

"I'll save those ten shells—for later."

Claus Winston merely leaned against the gallery post and began to whistle.

At the first note, Thames wheeled his horse and came riding back, shaking his gun, his face black with rage. He bent toward Winston, shouting:

"I'll get yo'——"

"Then yo're a fool t' talk about it this a way," Claus interrupted. "I might be found daid, with a hole in my back, and yo'd be blamed for it.

whereas if yo' kept still, yo'd only be suspected."

He walked into the hotel, exposing his back to the shaking gun of the raging man he had left behind.

Suddenly, Thames wheeled his horse, holstered his gun, threw his bay into a high lope. As he passed Claus Winston's horse he leaned over and snatched the lass rope free. He rode away with this trophy.

"He means t' force Winston t' ask for it and force a fight that a way," an old-timer growled to the others, and they nodded their heads with understanding. To take a man's rope was an insult that could not be overlooked.

Winston came out. Some one spoke eagerly:

"Thames took yo'r rope, Claus."

"Oh, did he?" And Claus went to his horse, mounted and swung out of town without a word further.

Behind him the town loungers discussed this latest turn of events. Opinion was that Thames had taken a step that would lead to a fight.

"Winston's dodged a fight with Thames a long time," Cadwold told them; "that's why he leaves his gun hung up every time he rides in and dismounts. They've mixed with bare hands, and Winston's always won. But Thames isn't satisfied with that."

"Pity two young ranchers, each with his own small place well in hand, cain't agree," one of the loungers spoke up. "Winston ought t' quit it."

"I guess Thames ought t' quit it," Cadwold retorted.

"I'll watch and see what happens when the shoot comes off," another man said. "If Thames rides in with Winston's rope, Claus will have t' claim it, and if does, it will mean a fight."

"I'll see about that; it's goin' t' be a day without any shootin', except at marks," Cadwold made known firmly. "We're not goin' t' have a holiday spoiled with two young roosters strutting around with spurs sharpened, all ready for a fight for real blood."

Leaving this plain threat against makers of violence behind him, the sheriff strode briskly down the street, hitching at his belt to ease the weight of his big gun.

"I guess the sheriff's right. We've made up a party and invited every one in, even that Cow Thief crowd. Antelope cain't afford t' have her hospitality spoiled by two young gab-squirts on the prod," one of the older men summed up the situation. "It'll be a day of amnesty and good cheer, and it's got t' be a day of peace, as well, and no shootin' except at marks set up by the committee on arrangements."

CHAPTER II.

ANTELOPE'S BIG DAY.

ANTELOPE'S big day dawned bright and fair. Early in the morning people began to arrive in buckboards, on horseback, in old covered wagons, containing whole families from ranches where the owners had married with the passing of the earliest days of all-men outfits. There were Indians and squaws from the not-distant reservation of one of the fiercest native tribes of other years. The town was decked in bunting, and a band had been got together, after careful rehearsals in several well-known tunes, which it was to play as best it could for the celebration.

The shooting events were to be held outside the town, to the north, on a level plot several hundred acres in extent. It was fairly level and used for the annual rodeo each fall. Now it was summer and work was slack, except in a few outfits that had range running back into the big hills, where stock was summer-run by some of the men. Even those, for that day, had thinned out their ranks of highland saddle men to almost nothing. The men who had drawn the unlucky lots were looking toward the

center of interest, from spur and high country headland fronting the lower hot belt, as if their unaided eyes could pierce through the miles of shimmering, heated air and see the outcome of the trials at marksmanship by shooters famed in all the country round about for accuracy and speed.

The booming of shotguns early told that the clay-pigeon matches had begun. Some of these were for girls and boys, others for men who fancied the scatter gun and used it in trips after mountain quail, and doves, and smaller game. The clay-pigeon traps were looked upon with a certain scorn by users of the six-gun and rifle, and the trap events were regarded as merely stop-gaps, to divert those easily amused, during the morning, while the people were arriving.

One thrill was furnished at the traps, however. It was when Hardy Thames rode out from town and, on a bet of fifty dollars a side, made with Sheriff Cadwold, "killed" twenty out of twenty-five clay "birds" with a rifle, at known traps and known angles. This proof of Hardy's skill with the long gun was greeted with loud applause, which he acknowledged by saying he was merely getting into practice for the coming big events.

The Rocking R outfit, headed by Ranse Rayner, its owner, came in just at noon and began at once trying to lay wagers on their best men entered in the can-rolling events—three of them. The Rocking R men were mostly old-timers who made it a practice to try their skill on every tin can they saw, and at that one form of marksmanship they were considered preëminent. Rayner encouraged them in it, holding that a man who could roll a can with the bullets from a six-gun could easily do his share toward keeping the Rocking R range clear of coyotes and wolves. The Rocking R men were bearded, rather heavy-set riders, all on big-boned horses groomed for the occasion till they shone like silk.

Claus Winston came in about noon, with a rifle under his knee, in its sheath and a single six-gun, carried on the left side, in sight. He rode with lips compressed and chin held high, hat brim at a straight line just over his nose. He was evidently in no mood to be trifled with. He swung down before the Golden Horn and entered, hardly answering those who greeted him. One man, a talkative lounger, shot at his back:

"I see yo've got a gun t'day, Claus. Hardy will be in soon."

Winston whirled on the fellow like a panther.

"Let him speak for himse'f, then; and yo' speak that a way, too, if it's in yo'."

"Whew, yo' needn't take a man up that a way," said the lounger, his face going white.

Claus slapped him with his open palm and the impact sent the fellow reeling. Claus turned his back and went indoors, leaving the gossips to talk over this event of seeming ill omen.

"I guess Claus is turnin' broncho at last, after all the naggin' Thames has put onto him t' make him fight," the slapped fellow said.

Thames was now approaching with Cadwold, rifle under his arm. Trouble-makers were not lacking to rush to him and tell him what had happened. Thames scowled and started toward the hotel. Cadwold laid a hand on his arm.

"Nothing like that t'day, Thames. Do all yo'r shootin' at marks."

"All right, sheriff," he replied, as if it cost him an effort to hold in his mounting anger.

Just then Claus Winston came out, puffing a cigar. The crowd parted before him, leaving a clear lane down to where Cadwold and Thames stood at the road's edge.

"Thames," Claus said quietly.

"Here!"

"I'm sayin' 'hello.' Yo've got a rope that don't belong t' yo' and yo'll hand it back before sundown."

He walked straight toward Thames, passing him so close that their clothing touched. Claus swung up on his nippy, eager, coyote stud without a word and rode toward the southern end of the town. It was all over so quickly that the crowd had only time to gasp before Claus was gone.

"I'm under pledge t' Cadwold not t' start anything to-day," Thames explained, appealing to Cadwold to confirm this. Cadwold nodded. The incident was lost for the moment in a flurry caused by the coming in of a large body of riders, at whose head was Old Brisette, his big beard flowing down over his chest. At his right, rode Lucille Brisette, in quiet gray, with a red-silk neckcloth fluttering under her dimpled chin. She had a rifle under her knee and a silver-mounted six-gun on her right side, and high up, under her left armpit, in a shoulder harness, rode another matching six-gun. They halted before the Golden Horn and a moment of silence ensued.

"Reg'lar show girl," Thames said in low tones to a friend, and a little laugh went around at the expense of the Cow Thief crowd. Old Brisette heard it and craned his neck to see what it was all about, but none of the laughers enlightened him and only those close to Thames were in on the joke, it seemed. Old Brisette spoke, for the benefit of every one:

"The Double B will have its own camp fire down on the shootin' flats; any one that wants in on our barbecue beef can come along. We're eatin' some of our own t'day, for a change," he ended dryly.

"It'll taste good." Cadwold met this spirit of raillery squarely, and they all had a laugh at the ancient joke. "Ever' one ought t' eat some of his own beef once in a while."

"Try it once, yo'rse'f," Old Brisette urged, and this was good for another loud guffaw. Cadwold beamed at this proof of good humor, as it eased over the moment of the entry of this suspected outfit into town on that all-important day.

The horse of Lucille Brisette suddenly developed a playful tendency and began a little walk that took him out into the middle of the road.

Old Brisette yelled: "A heel fly, dawggone him!"

The gray went into a buck. Lucille rode it lightly. She was smiling as the horse fought for his head. There was a sudden snapping sound and the girl almost fell over backward as the bridle rein broke close to the ring on the right side. The horse, getting his head, started to bawl, and then quit bucking and began to run. This sulden change in tactics caught the girl unawares and she threw her weight farther back, one foot slipping through the stirrup, that on the left side, toward the crowd. She tried to get erect and to keep from being thrown. The speed of the horse kept her body bent; she was unable to get her foot loose. Already a dozen men were spurring after her. Yells split the air.

As Lucille flashed down the street a leaping coyote horse came around the corner of a building where a narrow alley ran between structures. The lean rider swung over and got the bridle rein that Lucille had dropped. He slammed the gray back with iron grip, wrapping the bridle rein around his hand. The gray jerked sidewise, but he paused. That pause gave Lucille leverage enough to get erect, jerk her foot out of the stirrup and reseat it safely, the stirrup bar against the inside of her heel. The gray yielded. The riders came thundering up. The rider on the coyote horse handed the bridle

rein to Lucille as a man stepped up, afoot, on the other side and began to examine the broken end. The gray was quiet now, being too wise to start again when so many men with ropes on their saddles were at hand.

"I done said yo'd need a new rein, Lucy," Old Brisette spoke sharply, "but yo'd not listen. Here, Jason, rummage in my saddlebag and see if I've not got my rivet punch and mendin' outfit with me. Rivet that strap tight again and make a good, strong job out of it, too, Jason."

"I'm thankin' yo'," Lucille said to the man on the coyote.

"So are all the Cow Thief folks," Old Brisette jerked out, "aren't we, Jason?"

Jason, thick-bodied, handsome in a reckless style, grunted something grumblingly like assent. His big hat was pressed so hard against the gray in setting a rivet that the brim of it half-mooned above the arched neck of the horse. He set the last rivet with a grunt and stepped back:

"There, I've fixed it! I guess she'll hold now, Lucy."

"Thanks, Jason," said Lucille sweetly, yet she was looking at Claus Winston, who was sitting straight in his saddle now and holding his right hand in his left, his face writhing in pain.

"Hurt yo'r hand, cowboy?" Very sympathetic was her inquiry.

"I think that a wrap of those reins got around my trigger finger and it's out of joint."

Old Brisette spurred his horse around all the others to get to Claus. He took the injured hand in his, grasped the forefinger, and yanked on it. Claus winced with the pain, but was silent. Thames by now had reached the place afoot, with Cadwold at his side. Old Brisette spoke quickly.

"It was out of j'int, all right, but I snapped her in. Yo'll be able t' shoot again in a day or two, when she gets done swellin' and hurtin'."

"I guess that lets me out of the shootin' match, then," ruefully.

"And something else, too," Thames spoke up quickly.

"Oh, yo' there?" Claus eyed Thames steadily. "All right, in a day or two, then. But I want my rope by sundown."

Thames made no reply, except for a scowl.

"Spooky around he'e, it seems," Old Brisette perked out. "Sorry, cowboy, yo' got hurt helping our Lucy."

"I'm not," Claus drawled; "it's all in a lifetime."

"Where's this Frank Brisette yo've got entered in the fancy event?" Thames asked.

"We'll dig him up at the proper time, bub," Old Brisette replied, and his crowd laughed long and with evident enjoyment. "Wait till yo' see our Frank shoot, then go home and milk goats for a livin'."

Lucille whispered something to her escort, who said to Claus Winston heartily: "Come out with us and watch the shootin' from our hang-out; no more than fair after yo' hurt yo'rse'f helpin' our girl."

Claus accepted at once and they rode away in a scattering company. Jason ranged on the left side of Lucille, Claus on the right. Not a few dark glances were sent after the outfit from Cow Thief range, in for that day in peace. From lip to lip went whispers of suspicions against this or that member of the hard-bitten crew under Old Brisette. Thames shook his rifle in the air when they were pretty well toward the upper end of town.

"Well, Claus belongs with that crowd and I'm a-sayin' it right out loud."

"With his trigger finger lame, it's safe," some one said quietly.

Thames glanced fiercely around, but could not locate the speaker to his satisfaction. He began to boast of what he would do in the shooting events. It was

conceded that with Winston out of it, he was likely to have a fairly clear field.

"Rockin' R may get the can-rollin' event, but that will let every one out but me.. I've got a lot of new fancy shots that I've been working on," Thames boasted. "We're permitted t' try all sorts of stunts in that event and the crowd votes the winner, accordin' t' difficulty and novelty of the stunts put on by each shooter. I've got a few that will make that Frank Brisette's hair curl. If he starts practicin', get a line on him and let me know what he tries out."

So saying, Thames went into the Golden Horn to give his guns a thorough cleaning, after their use in hard practice.

On the street the excitement mounted as the newcomers arrived and set down their names for this or that event.

As many who came were new to the region, people asked of each new arrival:

"Is that Frank Brisette?"

But the expected fancy-shooting artist from Cow Thief did not arrive and he had not appeared when the band came to lead the grand march to the flats where the shooting was to take place.

CHAPTER III.

FRANK BRISETTE.

THERE was no grand stand at this frontier event. The spectators were banked along a rise to the north of the shooting field. Any one who wanted to range along the open space on the west or east sides of the tourney ground could do so, at his or her own risk. Every one knew that each contestant was expert with firearms, which reduced the chances of accident to the lowest possible point.

All the town loungers were there, commenting learnedly upon coming events and the past performances of the competitors.

The Cow Thief crowd were bunched at the center of the line of observation. Claus Winston was with them, chatting a great deal with Lucy Brisette and bantering Jason Brisette, who eyed him rather askance at times. Old Man Brisette watched all the preliminaries with his deep-set eyes, stroking his big beard the while thoughtfully. He gave curt phrases and short nods with all who saluted him. The Cow Thief crowd plainly were out on the rim of public regard, but for that wide-open day, when every one was welcome, they were guests of the town and not to be molested nor angered by references to past disappearances of other people's cattle, horses, or other property.

Thames, with some cronies, made veiled allusions to Winston's sudden liking for Cow Thief society. "That girl gives him an excuse for spendin' time with folks about on his real level," was one gibe.

This was accepted as true-blue wit by Thames' friends. He was entered in a number of events besides the fancy shooting, but announced rather loudly that he kept out of others, "so the other fellows can have a show for their white alleys." This seeming regard for the feelings of poorer shots gained Thames some praise among the careless.

With Claus out of it, Thames was looked upon as likely to win the most points and the fine, pearl-handled six-gun that the committee on arrangements now produced as the last added attraction and prize. It was laid out for inspection among the other merchandise prizes. These were atop of a big box decorated with colored papers and bunting, and the six-gun now became the center of attraction, as folks milled about to see the prizes.

"Let's go down and see that new gun," Lucille Brisette proposed to Winston and Jason, dividing her invitation between them impartially.

The two were on either side of the

new beauty of the Cow Thief clans as she strolled down to the point of greatest interest.

"That would be a nice, short gun for a girl," she remarked, touching it with one tapering forefinger.

"Maybe Frank will give it t' yo," Jason said.

"He might; all my cousins have been good to me since I came to live with yo'-all out on Cow Thief," she agreed.

"Can he shoot, this Frank?" Claus asked.

"I'll say he can," Jason praised.

"I'll give him a strong hint that I want that gun," Lucy laughed, as they drew away to make room for some others who wanted a close look at the prizes. So doing, they came face to face with Hardy Thames, pushing forward to view the newly displayed weapons.

A cold flame leaped into Winston's eyes. Thames looked away. They heard his voice rasp as he looked at the new six-gun:

"A reg'lar she-gun! When I win it, I'll give it t' some pretty girl or sell it. No man'd want such a plaything."

"One of my boys would sure appreciate it, Thames," Ranse Rayner spoke up, at Thames' elbow. "It's a pretty gun, but yo'll notice it chambers a .45, and that's a he-man's size of a slug all right."

"Get ready for the can-rollin' bee," "Bull" Terk, the announcer, cut loose through a megaphone made by the cupping of his big hands.

There was scurrying now and the groups interested in this preliminary event saw to it that their cinches were tight. The Lazy S had a trio of slim-jim riders who fancied themselves as can-rollers, as did the Falling Arrow. The conditions called for three men on each side, to roll cans, the trio rolling a can farthest with eighteen shots to win; each trio to compete in turn.

The Lazy S had the first chance. An empty tomato can was laid on a line drawn on the ground; the three riders were lined up, one behind the other, each with one gun ready, muzzle up, hammer thumbed and trigger taut.

The horses of each trio were gun-proof, steady as rocks under fire. The first Lazy S rider was about twenty feet from the can.

"Th' can's got t' be rolled straight as possible; distance counts from the line, straight ahaid, not by how far the can rolls if she circles off side," Bull announced finally. "Now, let 'er roll! And don't hit the can, or yo' get disqualified, and shoot fast, but straight. Let 'er roll, boys!"

Clel Mullins, first Lazy S shooter, snapped his gun down. The shattering report told that the tournament was on. The smoke eddied forth; the can leaped, the ball going just under it, into the soil. The horse of Mullins sprang forward, knowing the game, like a wise cow pony. The can slowed down when it was lifted again, the ball this time thudding so close under it that it received a mighty impetus from the shock. This shot was greeted with a cheer. The trick of it was to let the can roll as far as it would with every shock, and to shoot again before it stopped, thus getting what advantage there was in its remaining momentum. Each ball, to avail most, must strike the ground very close to the can, and at its middle. A hit close, but under either end, would make the can turn and roll off to the side. Clel's third shot did this, and the can swerved; he had to waste the fourth shot getting the can back into line, and this took very close shooting, too. His fifth and sixth shots went true and he whirled his horse out of the way of his teammate, Sandy Bossom, who came on, firing like a machine, clicking off the gains with each well-placed shot. Allen Rhines came next, to add many needed feet to the toll of the team, and when the last shot had been fired Lazy S had sent its can sixty

yards from the starting line. Not a shot had struck the can.

There was a loud ripple of applause, for this was, indeed, good shooting. The Falling Arrow men came to the starting line with rather glum looks; they were plainly nervous. This was apparent when the second shot of their second shooter, Lem Burns, hit the can and thus put the Arrow bunch out of the contest.

The Rocking R men came to the line confidently. Ranse Rayner led off, yelling, as he swung down his gun for the first shot, "Git out o' thar, yo' sneakin' coyote!" and the crowd laughed.

This shot was so close that it seemed as if the can had been hit. It rolled true, though, and leaped again and yet again and again as Ranse followed it. His second man was shooting almost before Ranse whirled aside after his sixth shot. This was "Ace" Burdelle, who held up the reputation of his clan well, for the can kept going straight ahead under his shooting tactics. Hardly had the sixth shot of Burdelle boomed than "Ace" Burdette, his close chum, sent his pony plunging through the smoke. Burdette leaned far over, giving his bullet greater sending force, and the can leaped and came down rolling rapidly. It struck on one end, though, and spun off-side. Burdette had to waste his second shot straightening the can out and then sent his other four all true. It was at once seen that Rocking R had won by a good three yards, and the Lazy S and Falling Arrow men hastened to shake hands with their conquerors. The prize, a box of cigars, was passed around, the winners and losers soon setting up a column of smoke that marked where they sat in their saddles to watch the other events.

Now followed a number of minor events, shooting at cans tossed up, at bottles swinging between poles, trap shooting for the boys and girls. The crowd watched these tolerantly, as something for the less adept handlers of firearms. There were no ringed targets to shoot at, at stated distances. It was all shooting at moving objects. Turkeys and chickens were put up as prizes to be shot at, their heads sticking up through holes in boxes.

Hardy Thames watched these events as if he were rather bored. He also watched the Cow Thief crowd to note if the expected fancy shooter appeared, that he might estimate the newcomer's caliber before meeting him in competition. Claus Winston was still with the Cow Thief bunch, apparently well pleased to sit next to Lucille Brisette. She was looking at Winston's injury. He was shaking his head and making a wry face as she twisted the finger, as if trying to see if it were really stiff and sore after its recent dislocation and the rough replacement that Old Brisette had given it. Thames sneered to his hangers-on as they noted this little byplay. Jason Brisette scowled, and this was noted by Thames as one of his friends whispered:

"That big Cow Thief man would like t' have that gal's attentions pretty much to his own se'f, wouldn't he?"

Time passed rather slowly while the minor events were being shot off and the prizes awarded. The Lazy S evened up with Rocking R by winning the steer-killing contest, shooting down the loosed three-year-old with three shots, all in the head, and stopping the running beef within ten yards of the starting point, where the ropes were cast off him, whereas Rocking R took four shots and their steers got fifteen yards. The steers, destined for the barbecue that night, were at once hauled away to be dressed and bedded down in a pit of coals already made and sown over with sage to impart a holiday flavor to the roasted beef.

Some fancy rope-spinning tests and athletic stunts for the boys and girls

were interspersed with the minor shooting events. Cow Thief men had taken some of the minor prizes, although none of them had done anything sensational. Brisette had let some of the events go by default, keeping his men out of them, and thereby winning some public esteem, for that gave others a better chance to win, as all the Cow Thief men were known to be good at trigger play.

Now came the big event of the afternoon, the fancy shooting. It developed that Burdelle for Rocking R wanted to be in on this event, as did Clel Mullins for Lazy S. Thames' name and fame had scared others out. With Claus Winston out of it, Thames was expected to win, as it was known that he had a repertoire of fancy shots that no one else in that region could equal. He went to distant rodeos and shot in the fancy events and was looked upon by some as a professional, who really had no right to compete at home against range men working for a living, but as the rules did not bar him, his entry had been accepted.

Bull Terk came to the announcer's place importantly and gained the attention of the crowd by bellowing a few times. Then he began to restate the rules of the fancy-shooting event, first alluding to Claus Winston's mishap and ruling that as it had been an unavoidable accident, all bets made on Winston's success were off.

"This simmers down t' Hardy Thames against the field," Bull went on. "We all know how he can shoot. The rules call for each contestant t' make up his own program of events and the crowd is t' vote at the close.

"The contestants will lay out their own program. They can shoot horseback or afoot, pick out their own marks, and the committee on arrangements will give them any assistance they need. The reason for such rules is that while every fancy shooter has some stunts he does well, others may not have done those same stunts and would be handicapped at the same games. Now we hold that it is just a case of each showing off best at his own game. Gents, pick your own kind of shootin' and go t' it. Short guns or rifles may be used, and no questions asked but 'Did yo' hit what yo' aimed at?' and the crowd decides which has put on the best show. The entries are: Ace Burdelle for Rockin' R; Clel Mullins for Lazy S; Hardy Thames for himself, and—Frank Brisette for the folks over on Cow Thief, our guests for the day."

Mullins, Burdelle, and Thames were down in front. Every one looked at the Cow Thief contingent. Claus Winston got up. Jason Brisette came to his feet. Old Brisette bounced high, tugging at his big beard. He let out a yell, and the Cow Thiefers all snapped erect.

"Now, boys, a long yell for Frank, our champion."

"Yi, yi, yippiti-yi-yiiiiii-i-i!"

The long rebel yell resounded, followed by a long-drawn-out wolf howl, and then a slim, erect form came from the midst of the hard-bitten crew as her ample skirt was cast aside and Lucy Brisette stood revealed in cord knickers, a rifle held in the crook of her arm, her two six-guns slung low, the holsters tied down. She strode forward as the crowd stared silently.

"Yo'll see some shootin' now," Old Brisette roared. "Wait till our Frank begins. Folks, Miss Lucille Frances Brisette, but we call her our Lucy or Frank, out in Cow Thief."

Thames' lips curled in scorn:

"Nothin' but a he-she girl, eh? If that's the best Cow Thief can do——"

"Do yo' shootin' with yo' guns, not yo' mouth, cowboy," Frank cut him short, "and make it straight shootin' and that'll let yo' out, entire."

A roar of laughter went up from the crowd.

"Who'll bet on the event?" Old Brisette challenged.

Thames' friends, all town men, crowded forward to take up Cow Thief money. Lazy S and Rocking R began to back their men rather gingerly, asking odds. The final bets made, every one looked again at the cool, slender girl, with the rifle in the crook of her rounded arm, and the two low-hung guns against her limbs.

"Draw for who shoots first," Bull Terk ordered, producing four straws. "The shortest straw shoots first, and each contestant makes his or her own program. The crowd decides, by vote, who wins. Pick your straw and let's get a-goin' while the light's good for fancy shootin'."

In silence, the crowd watched the drawing. Then Bull announced:

"Burdelle shoots first, Mullins second, Thames third, and Frank Lucy Brisette last. Let 'er roll, and may the best man or girl win!"

CHAPTER IV.

FANCY SHOOTING.

ACE BURDELLE proceeded to put on a slow, careful line of shooting. He had a friend hold up a half dollar between thumb and forefinger and shot it out with a .22 rifle, offhand. He then knocked a clay pipe out of the mouth of his friend, and shot a potato off his head. He used a mirror, turned his back to his helper, lined up his sights by reflection, and repeated these stunts. He shot at stones tossed up, using his six-gun and rifle, and scored a fair proportion of hits. Finally, he rode his horse at a good fox-trot past six bottles set on small stakes far up the field, and got three out of the six. This is pretty fair amateur shooting and Burdelle was applauded.

Clel Mullins went over about the same line of conservative shots, using his six-gun more than his rifle, and making about the same average of hits as Burdelle had made. This was held to put him higher than Burdelle, the six-gun being harder to use at moving targets than the rifle. Clel also stood up in the stirrups as he passed the row of bottles and shot standing up, and his horse was in a low lope, too.

But these two trials were known to be merely preliminary affairs. Thames had a big reputation to sustain and he had let it be known that this time he intended to extend himself to the limit, "so it wouldn't be said that any divided skirt could beat a man at throwin' lead."

He had called upon some of his friends to help him. First he had a small folding table brought out. This was set up right before the center of the crowd. Here he laid out several six-guns, a light rifle, and a heavier one. His friends brought on a box of clay balls, glass balls, bottles, potatoes, and other marks. His lanky bay was led out and held in readiness to one side. While even the best of the other horses were a wee bit nervous under gunfire, this bay was like a rock, from long training. He did not even toss his head at the crack of a gun close by, neither did he snort, or paw with his fore hoof.

First, Thames had two clay balls thrown up. His sixes whipped out and broke the balls, right and left, just as they seemed poised to come down. It was a neat bit of speed and accuracy, and drew a murmur of applause.

Thames turned his head toward where the girl shooter sat on a blanket spread for her by Old Brisette.

"Very nice work, Mr. Thames," Lucy praised him.

"Huh, that's boy play!" he boasted.

Now his helper threw up three balls. These Thames smashed with his small rifle, working the repeater lever like chain lightning. He got one going up, one at the poise, and one coming down. Again his quick work drew applause. He plainly was at his best.

Now, at a signal, a man threw up a bottle. Thames, who was three paces

from the table, leaped, landed on the table, then whipped out his six-gun and got the bottle in mid-air. This showy trick brought a small storm of approval. Again Thames signaled, and his helper threw up two bottles, one straight up, the other straight ahead. Thames leaped to the table, snapped the falling bottle that was going ahead, then upended his gun and caught the one overhead, the bits of falling glass coming down straight on him.

Now he began to go over the tricks of the two former contestants, shooting, instead of a half dollar, a nickel from between a man's thumb and forefinger. Instead of shooting a pipe from a man's mouth, he shot the ash of a cigar. Where Clel and Ace had used a big mirror, he used a tiny mirror to shoot with his back to the target. At every point his work showed refinement and fire and skill. Instead of shooting a large potato off a man's head, he shot a small one off. And so it went, as he followed their feats one by one, and into each he put something more of skill and dash. The applause for him gained in volume at every point he scored.

"Now for my horse," he exclaimed, as he picked up a fresh rifle and an untouched pair of six-guns. He holstered the latter and put the rifle in its sheath, then mounted gracefully. Already his helpers had set up five stakes, besides those used by Clel and Ace in their trials of skill down the field. On each was a bottle or clay or glass ball.

Thames started his horse on a high lope. Nearing the line of bottles, he jerked out a six-gun and began to shoot standing up in the stirrups, leaning over, and his gun seemed to roar without a break in sound.

Along with the roar of the gun went the clinking of smashed glass. Thames got all five of the bottles in a row.

As the crowd cheered, he jerked out his rifle and continued, breaking three of the clay or glass balls on the other five stakes. He rode back to face the crowd, well satisfied with himself.

"Fair," Old Brisette shouted; "but wait till our girl shoots. Then yo'll see real fancy shootin'."

"Huh, is she some professional lady sharp?" Thames demanded insultingly.

"No; she's never shot in public before. She learned how t' shoot huntin' game in the Brazos bottoms. Guns have been her playthings since she was a kid, and since she came t' Cow Thief we've let her amuse herself all she wanted t'."

Thames signed again to his helpers, and they went down the field to put marks on the ten stakes. He reloaded his weapons and held his horse lightly in hand. The helpers signaled and stepped aside. Thames lifted the horse to a rapid, easy gallop and leaned over again. He passed the bottles and other targets with his six-guns going like lightning, and with them alone he got eight out of ten marks. The crowd applauded loudly. Thames reined up sharply and was seen to be reloading. A helper came out on a horse, a basket on the crook of one arm, the reins held in the hand on that side. He got ahead of Thames and started his horse toward the crowd, reaching over into the basket and throwing up clay balls as fast as he could. Thames came after him, shooting fast, and getting most of them. This act ended with the helper throwing three balls up at once and Thames, sweeping up his rifle, got them all easily. The crowd roared with delight. Thames announced:

"That'll do me for now, unless Clel and Ace want t' try t' catch up with me by puttin' on some new stunts."

Clel and Ace disclaimed all intention of so doing and Thames dismounted, one of his men walking his bay horse offside. Thames sat down on his table, remarking to a friend:

"I'm not goin' t' lend her my table so she can duplicate my feats. It's up t'

her t' do her best, without no sympathy wasted on a woman."

Thames' friends agreed to this in low whispers.

"I'll need a table, if I am to follow Mr. Thames," Lucy announced, as she snapped erect, "but it wouldn't be fair to ask him for his folding table, and so make use of his forethought. I'll ask some one to bring me one of the tables from that refreshment booth over there."

Half a dozen Cow Thief men started at once. The table was a heavy plank-and-beam affair, at least a foot higher than the low, fancy table Thames had used. The crowd realized that in using it, Lucy had placed a handicap on herself from the start.

"Lucy'll make out, don't worry! She's never done any of these table-jumpin' feats," Jason Brisette said sharply, "but we'll back her in anything she undertakes. When it comes t' counter-jumpin', Mr. Thames is a winner, but watch our gal make him eat smoke!"

"Our Lucy Frank hasn't any clay balls or glass balls or any other professional stuff," Old Brisette announced, but we've got a lot of small bottles that will do, I guess, t' throw up for her t' shoot at."

A basket of small bottles, half the size those used by Thames, was placed on the big, rough table. They were small medicine bottles, not empty beer or whisky flasks. When they were shown to the crowd a murmur of approval went up and one old-timer shouted:

"They ain't half as big as Thames used. If she can equal his hits on them, she's a daisy."

Lucy came to the center of the table, facing the open space beyond it. She signaled and a Cow Thief man threw up a tiny bottle. The girl sprang onto the table, soft as a thistledown, and with the speed of light, found the bottle with her six-gun's bullet. The crowd cheered. Lucy leaped down, signaled again, and this time three bottles went up, thrown together. The girl fired once as she was in the air, leaping for the table, once as the bottles seemed to poise for the fall, and the third time as the last bottle started to fall. Each bottle was powdered and the shooting was so rapid that seasoned range men gasped.

"She shoots by instinct, dawg-gone it," Cadwold spluttered, his eyes shining with excitement. "She just shakes them bullets out of her gun."

"And she shot three small bottles t' his two big ones, that trick," Ranse Rayner praised the supple girl from Cow Thief.

Lucy signaled to Claus Winston, who took his stand fifteen yards from her. He held up a penny. She shot it from between thumb and forefinger with her small rifle. She seemed hardly to take sight. Old Brisette sauntered out, smoking a new cigarette. She shot, not the ash, but the cigarette itself, powdering his beard with bits of makin's. A cheer greeted this proof of her nerve and accuracy.

"We, not being overfond of primpin' before a mirror, don't use any in this contest," Old Brisette announced. "Our girl can use another kind of reflector for that back-shootin' event. Here, Frank, will this do?"

He plucked a huge bowie knife from his belt and handed it to her. The blade, polished brightly, made a narrow reflector. Jason Brisette squared off at the required distance, and the girl turned her back to him and shot a small bottle off his head, using the knife blade to reflect the sights and target, and so line them up.

And so the girl went on, duplicating everything that the others had done, but always with a touch of refinement on each event that made Thames fairly wriggle with rising rancor and jealousy.

Heretofore his supremacy in fancy shooting never had been challenged in that whole region. Other men were known to excel him in shooting at game, for it often happens that a man who is good at the traps or in set events is not the best shot at wild game. This supremacy in his chosen branch of sport had meant a great deal to Thames. Now it seemed that a slip of a girl was to take it away. Had it been done by a man it would not have been so bad, but to have a girl do it galled him to the depths. He was hoping that some accident would befall this nervy, light-footed, quick-fingered girl. Would she shoot as well from the back of a horse as she had shot on foot? He looked curiously around to where Lucy's gray was being led forward by a Cow Thief man, ready for the shooting from horseback.

Bull Terk now advanced to make some announcements of winners in the events of the younger set. As there was a certain rivalry over these, especially among the boys and girls, all attention was given to Bull, and his tale of awards to the young shooters was greeted with applause. During this intermission Lucy Brisette sat on the table she had used, swinging her feet with carefree abandon that proved to Thames how untouched were her nerves. She was laughing and chatting with Claus Winston, Jason Brisette, Ranse Rayner, Sheriff Cadwold, and others. The best people of the region had come forward to pay their respects. Thames could vision what this meant for the heretofore ostracized Cow Thief contingent, long suspected of having a part in mysterious disappearances of fine bulls, horses, and other range stock, as well as of knowing about the rustling of bunches of commoner cattle from time to time. Lucy, he could see, might form friendships that would open the way to the Cow Thief group being received with better grace by the more settled people of the wide and rich range region. Thames had long been hinting that the Cow Thief folks were at least aware of who the thieves were, and it galled him to think that they might win public opinion to an extent that would call for more than hints to keep suspicion turned their way.

Several men had sauntered over to where Lucy's horse was standing, held by a Cow Thief man, ready for her to make the trials of skill on horseback when Bull Terk should complete his announcements. Thames joined them, remaining well away from the horse, on the side toward the thickest part of the crowd, which was giving all its attention to Bull and his announcements.

Lucy's horse was the same dark-dappled gray on which she had ridden into Antelope when he had first seen her. He looked over the riding rig with critical eye.

"Nice hoss," a near-by rancher remarked.

"Sure is," Thames admitted, with a show of heartiness, "and I must say she's some shootin' girl, too."

"She sure is. I'm glad t' hear yo' praise her; we-all thought yo'd turned sour and was feelin' ornery, Thames."

Thames grinned, as if his feelings were of small moment. His eyes took in the stirrup leather on the side toward him. High up, close to the saddle's seat, an extra loop, large enough to hold a woman's foot, was to be seen. This held Thames' attention. Bull was still droning on, every sentence followed by applause, as he awarded some trifle to the lucky or skilled lads or lasses. Thames walked unnoticed around the gray horse, the man who was holding the animal being interested in Bull's announcements, too, and thus paying little attention to what went on close at hand.

On the other side of the saddle, Thames noted another high-up foot loop. These loops puzzled him. He noted another behind the cantle, and one

stitched to the saddle skirt, just ahead of and slightly below the horn. He shook his head, puzzled, and started around the head of the horse, which was standing quietly. He noted that the horse had a common straight-bar bit.

Now Bull was announcing some added events for novices and this gained him close attention. The man holding the horse was listening to and watching Bull. The other men who had sauntered over to look at the gray close at hand, had gone.

As he passed around the horse's head, Thames' right hand came from his side pocket. He had but just hesitated. The horse snorted and blew from his nostrils as if dust or something else irritating were in the air. The man holding the horse glanced around sharply, but Thames was hidden by the animal, who made no further sound of annoyance. Bull droned on. The holder of the horse looked at Bull. Thames strolled back and sat down, beside his table. His hand worked at the loose soil a moment, then was still. He was a little apart from all the other spectators; many had moved from there the better to watch Lucy.

A friend of Thames, who had been sitting close to the tables—a man whose close-set eyes and weak chin denoted a lack of firm character—leaned over and began to joke him about the girl's shooting, and Thames laughingly replied:

"Well, it's all right if she wins; she's only a girl and it would bust her heart if she lost."

The fellow dropped his voice to a whisper and said:

"Sure would. Nice hoss she's got, Thames."

"Sure is, Griston." To suit the other's mood Thames had dropped his voice, too.

"I see yo've got all yo'r guns marked with yo'r initials?"

"Yes, I did that some time ago; thought some one might lift one of them some time in a strange town when I'm giving an exhibition and had my back turned."

"Have the initials engraved on?" with a cunning leer.

"Yes, fellow in Frio did it, real handy that a way. His engraving tool slipped on a couple of them and he touched it up afterward with acid t' cover up the blobs, but, in the main, he did a right nice job, Griston."

"Sure did."

"And now, laydeeees, and gent-el-men, and kids," Bull was sonorously announcing, "Miss Brisette will ray-sume her spel-en-did ex-hi-bi-shun of fawncee shootin', and may the best shooter win."

Lucy was greeted with cheers as she mounted the gray. Her light rifle was handed her. Cow Thief helpers scurried down to where the stakes were, carrying bottles in baskets, little empty milk tins, small potatoes.

"Now yo'll see some real shootin'," Old Brisette roared.

"I guess yo' saw some," Thames came back, "when I shot."

"Fair," Brisette drawled, "fair t' middlin'."

"What can a girl do more than Thames has done?" Griston asked.

"Wait, son, give her time," Brisette urged, as if talking to a mere lad. "Yo' young gab-squirts sure are impatient."

Griston was assailed by roars of teasing laughter as Lucy rode down the empty field. Her helpers now had five marks on as many stakes and she jockeyed her mount for a run along the line. The horse responded like a flash, and the girl, with her right foot suddenly hooked into one of the extra loops, her right hand grasping the horn, swung around under the neck of the galloping horse, Indian-fashion, and shot with her left hand from under the horse's neck, getting four out of the five targets as she thus flashed past the posts at the top speed of her eager mount.

The roar from the crowd told Thames that the girl had outclassed him again. Even Griston, his close friend, turned on him with:

"She sure can put a fancy edge on her shootin'."

Thames nodded moodily. "Wait," he whipped out, "she cain't have such luck all the way."

"That ain't luck; it's skill and nerve," Ranse Rayner retorted.

Thames did not reply to this, but it was plain to be seen that the crowd generally approved of what Ranse had said.

"Thanks, neighbor," Old Brisette said to Rayner.

Lucy came back to the rough table, leaving her helpers down the field setting up marks on the ten stakes. They put potatoes on some stakes, on others little milk cans, on others bottles. This time she handed down her six-guns to be reloaded for her, and elected to use her light rifle.

She whirled the gray as if he were on a pivot, and he sprang for the line of posts like a frightened elk. The girl swung past the little line of marks, the lever on her rifle going with extreme rapidity. She got every mark, throwing the shots with apparent abandon. She whirled the horse around sharply and sent him skimming back to the table, the crowd cheering wildly as she came.

"I suppose that was luck?" Ranse Rayner jeered at Thames.

Thames was silent, as were all his friends.

"I'll try for ten shots with my six-gun," Lucy announced now, "sitting straight up in the saddle."

The gray was excited now. He fretted at the bit, and from Thames' eyes shot the fire of renewed interest. Lucy handed down the rifle and received her six-guns. She inspected them, holstered them swiftly. The signal came from below that the marks were placed. She swung her horse around sharply and set him toward the line of stakes. Her guns began to talk as she dropped the bridle reins over the horn, and then turned sidewise in the saddle. She got five of the marks in a row, when her horse stumbled. Trying to recover, she had to let her left gun fall and reach for the reins, to hold the horse's head up. The two shells remaining in her right gun she let go, even as she fought the horse's head, and then the rein broke.

The snapping of the rein, with her weight against it, caused the girl's supple body to slew around; another stumble of the horse completed the damage, for she twisted to the left side, falling clear. The good horse stumbled forward a few paces, caught himself, and whirled back to her side, standing over her docilely even before the Cow Thief helpers got to her. They lifted the girl up. People began to surge forward, but Bull Terk commanded every one to keep back, and Lucy recovered herself and stood erect, bowing and smiling, between the two Cow Thief helpers.

"Not hurt; just shook up some," one of the men shouted. Lucy swung to her saddle again, her guns were handed to her, and she proceeded to make them ready, as the horse was led toward the starting line. A Cow Thief man had the animal's bit by the ring and in his other hand he had the broken bridle rein. He showed it to Old Brisette, who crowded forward to see what was wrong. The rein had parted just above the ring on the right side.

"Queer how these Cow Thief folks have such hard luck with bridle reins," Thames sneered, as he peered at it from the edge of the crowd about the horse. "Had bridle rein busted in town the other day, too. Bridle-rein leather must be sca'ce over on Cow Thief."

There was a growl of resentment from the Brisette clan at this, but at a sharp word from their veteran leader it died in their throats.

"I guess that heat was mine; she didn't do as good as I did, accordin'," Thames claimed.

"It sure is that a way," Bull Terk decided. "She didn't break as many targets as yo' did, but she certainly did what she could, while she was in shape t' shoot."

Old Brisette was looking at the broken rein. He now said:

"Funny, how that leather's all spongy and soft right whe'e it broke and no whe'e else, folks. It looks like it was burned or rotted some way."

He offered it for inspection and the men wagged their heads over it with the wide wisdom of experience in such matters. They knew leather and all that pertained to saddlery, and spoke their minds.

Thames had gone back to sit beside his table, where the guns and other things were. Griston came with the glum-faced gun artist, and as they sat down a bit apart from all others, he whispered again:

"Sure looks like acid burn on that leather, Thames." And now the close-set eyes were eagerly on Thames' face.

"Nothing like it. They use any old stuff over on Cow Thief t' fix up saddles and harness. Old Brisette likely gave the girl a piece of used leather for bridle reins and she pulled hard on them once too often."

"If the Cow Thief crowd are as bad as yo've hinted, they're men that would be apt t' take pretty good care that all their hoss gear was in fine shape." This with a leering insistence that irritated Thames.

"Forget it, Griston."

"She might've got killed or hurt bad takin' that fall."

"Yes, but who'd care? Those Cow Thiefers are a liability on this whole region, anyway. Now, let this drop, Griston, or——" and he scowled darkly.

"I guess yo're right about that last, Thames," said Griston with a hasty acquiescence that proved how Thames dominated him.

Thames' hand was fumbling over the ground at his side, right where he had fingered it when he had sat down there first, after looking over the gray. Griston seemed to gather courage for another shot:

"A touch of acid, like that fellow used truing up those engraving marks on your guns, when he put your brand onto them, would've ate a strip of leather like that so it would be spongy."

Thames' hand came away from the earth as if something had stung him.

"Shet—up! Great snakes, I thought a tarantula nipped me! No more of that kind of hints, Griston."

"Heel fly, most likely. She's about ready; they've slipped a new set of bridle reins on her hoss," Griston remarked, and Thames got up to watch Lucy ride down the field. As he did so, he trod heavily on the spot where his fingers had clawed the ground, pressing it down firmly again. Griston noted this, and repressed a faint grin.

Down the field the Cow Thief helpers signaled that all was ready. Lucy took the reloaded six-guns handed to her by Claus Winston, holstered them carefully, making sure they were not either stuck or too loose. Then she took her feet from the stirrups, worked them into the extra foot loops close to the saddle, flashed erect, Cossack style, called on the horse, and started down the field toward the stakes, followed by a roar of admiration from the crowd.

Thames watched her go with a malevolent leer on his dark features. He had seemed to take his honors as a fancy shooter lightly, competing with an easy grace that passed for cool nerve. This had come from the feeling that no one could challenge his supremacy with the rifle and, except for Claus Winston, at straight shooting. Claus had no superior with the six. At fancy shooting, Thames was known to rank even Claus.

But the threat of dethronement sent bitterness to his lips and a throb of hatred to his heart. That it was a girl's skill he had to fear made it all the harder. He looked away from her, unable to look upon her and breathe calmly wishing to show his indifference.

"A girl, a slip of a girl," he kept thinking. "Just a girl. I'll be laughed off these ranges——"

A roar from the crowd made him look at her again. Now she was at the line of stakes and began to throw lead at the difficult marks. She was erect, yet she swayed lightly to the send of the galloping horse's springlike muscles. She had snapped the reins behind her shoulders and was leaning slightly against them to steady herself, yet it was her superb balance and rhythm that kept her upright. She had to stand a little sidewise, so that her left-hand gun could be crossed to the right in making her left-hand shots, but this did not seem to bother her in the least. The steady tattoo of her shots told of her perfect self-control, and the tinkling of glass, the jump of pierced can or potato, testified to her accuracy. At the end of the row of stakes she had knocked off nine out of the possible ten, or one better than Thames. Added to this, she had shot in a more spectacular style, taking chances he had not taken in making her better mark.

Lucy sank to her knees on the saddle, worked her feet clear of the high foot loops and came down to the regular riding position. She circled the gray back toward the crowd, reloading on the run. A great roar of applause greeted her as she drew her horse up before her table. Her face was flushed with excitement, her eyes dancing with the sheer joy of living. Thames glanced at her, a mean light in his dark eyes as Claus Winston came forward on one side and Jason Brisette on the other to give her warm praise.

"Well, how do yo' like the gal from Cow Thief?" Old Brisette yelled, jumping in the air and cracking his high heels together. "Any one else want t' bet against her?"

There was no reply to this challenge. Thames signaled to his friends and they drew around him. He motioned for them to sit down. They consisted of town men mostly. They began to cheer for him, but rather faint-heartedly. During the moment of confusion Lucy handed down her six-guns and took up her small rifle, a pump-repeater action. Like the small rifle of Thames, it was a .22. A Cow Thief lad appeared with a basket of small bottles. He swung to a wiry pony and started down the field, Lucy after him. Far down the field they turned and Lucy was seen to swing from the saddle and lay herself alongside the horse, using her stirrup, pushed far forward on the left, to sustain the lower part of her body, while, above, her weight was borne in the high-placed extra loop behind the cantle, into which she had hooked her right arm to the elbow. Thus she hung as in a cradle, with her back bracing her to the horse's easy lope and her face to the sky. Her hat had fallen off; her long, fair hair waved back. Her helper threw bottles into the air and she began to shoot. Coming toward the crowd, she kept the pump of the repeater going rapidly, as one, two, or three bottles went into the air at a time. Out of sixteen chances, she made good on thirteen.

As the horse stopped, she drew herself erect, freed herself from the loop, and got to her saddle just as the crowd rose and thundered its ovation. She swung down, and Bull Terk called for a vote to decide the winner. He pointed to Thames, and a small chorus of "Ayes" went up; he pointed to the girl from Cow Thief, and a perfect roar of applause greeted her as she bowed and smiled her appreciation.

"Miss Brisette wins, by a mile," Bull Terk announced boomingly, and again

and again the crowd cheered the plucky girl from the outer ranges. The Cow Thief men eagerly went about collecting their bets and added to the din of approval for their favorite. Claus Winston pressed forward to shake Lucy's hand and found Jason right at his elbow, all smiles, too.

Only where Thames and his friends were clustered was there silence. The town men were hard hit. They had backed Thames to the utmost. Among them were a number of cheap gamblers, hangers-on about the town's worst resorts, and they were particularly angry. Griston chummed with this element and he kept whispering to them and nodding darkly toward the Cow Thief contingent. Their bad humor was increased when the committee announced that two guns were the main prize.

"I hereby award t' Miss Brisette these fine six-guns," Bull announced importantly, handing the pretty weapons to the blushing girl. She took them, admired them a moment, and then, with a bow, handed them back.

"I wish yo'd put them back into the town's entertainment fund and use them again," she urged. "They're really too pretty a pair of sixes to use in rough work, and all my guns are for use, not ornament. Or, auction them off and put the money into the Cattlemen's Relief Fund."

This proof of her generosity was greeted by another burst of applause. Thames and his friends showed plainly that it was distasteful to them. But no one was paying them much heed by now. Lucy had captured the fancy of the crowd. Ace Burdell and Clel Mullins came forward to congratulate the smiling girl who had defeated them, along with Thames, so easily.

"If it was just hittin' a few more marks, it wouldn't count so much; but it's the way yo' did it," Clel praised Lucy. "Say, how about goin' with me t' some dance? A girl that can shoot that a way ought t' be a swell dancer."

"I don't see how that follows," Lucy protested.

"And remember that I can dance, too," Ace put in a bid for closer acquaintance with the heroine of the hour.

The crowd began to break up. The Cow Thief contingent surrounded Lucy. Claus Winston remained with them, Jason Brisette crowding close to the girl, as well. Thames whispered to his friends:

"These range men will about fade away. I heard Old Brisette say he was going t' take his crowd into town t' celebrate; keep t'gether, boys, and we may get even with them yet. It wouldn't take much t' turn the town people, or some of them, against that Cow Thief crowd. Trail with me and see what happens."

To be continued in next week's issue of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE.

FREAK COLOR SCHEMES IN FURS

SOME of Nature's strange pranks have recently manifested themselves in pelts received at Tacoma, Washington, where they have been on exhibition. Some of these abnormalities are white beaver, white squirrel, white muskrat, and black raccoon, as well as other kinds of skins marked in strange and unnatural color effects.

It is said that there have been fox furs from Alaska that were partly red and partly white, or they have had red pelage with black legs and ears. Recently, a mink was displayed that was marked with stripes similar to those of a skunk.

The Stake Pullers

by Christopher B. Booth

Author of "The Galloping Kid—Bunk-house Sleuth," etc.

CHAPTER 1.

DINNER OR A RAZOR?

WITH a powerful sweep of the paddle, Donovan shot his canoe around the last turn of the stream and out into the lake, clear as a mirror and this morning quiet as a lily pool. Big Moose was not always so tranquil, for a wide stretch of water nearly thirty miles long can work itself into a sizable tempest, but to-day there was barely enough wind to ripple the glassy sheet and play with the sunbeams.

Ahead was the trading post where, for a quarter of a century, old Jules LeBlanc had been buying skins and selling supplies, a log-built settlement that was the last link between civilization and the wilderness from which Donovan now emerged. The dock was deserted and the only visible sign of habitation was a thin curl of smoke, drifting lazily from the chimney of a shack on the hillside. That would be Pierre Deru's widow cooking dinner—and what a meal she served for the ridiculous price of half a dollar! Donovan smacked his lips and again drove in his paddle.

A big man, Donovan, with wide shoulders that tapered to a slim waist. His sleeves were rolled up to his elbows and the muscles were like cords of steel playing beneath the flesh of his forearms. Although he had come a great distance, there was no indication of weariness in the rhythmic flash of the paddle that sent the light craft skimming swiftly forward. A three days' growth of beard did not quite conceal that he was young, perhaps yet to reach the age of thirty, and with the name of Donovan it was to be expected that his eyes would be blue. They were, and bright with the light of the man who is glad to be alive.

Donovan floated to the trading-post dock, leaped lightly to the planking, and lifted his canoe clear of the water. Then he strode swiftly up the sharply inclining sidewalk, two narrow boards wide, to the store. Old Jules LeBlanc appeared in the doorway, and his dark, shrewd eyes smiled with pleasure, to be immediately followed by a deep frown of stern disapproval, for he saw that Donovan had come empty-handed.

"Not so much as one pelt, eh?" he demanded sternly. "Still wasting the good time looking for that phantom gold—you who last season brought in six silver foxskins and more good furs besides! A trapper so luck as 'Lucky' Donovan frittering away his time and his talents with such foolishness!"

Donovan—"Lucky" Donovan they called him up here in the North country—laughed merrily and drew a leather poke from his pocket.

"Phantom gold, is it, Jules?" he retorted. "Weigh this on your scales, and tell me I've been frittering away my time!" Into his cupped palms he poured a handful of nuggets and, grinning triumphantly, offered them for Jules LeBlanc's amazed inspection. "Now do you say that mining isn't a more profitable business than trapping, Jules? Gold is where you find it."

"Donovan's luck!" exclaimed the old trader, taking one of the nuggets between his fingers and examining it with a more or less expert eye. "This looks like a real strike."

"No, Jules, that's only the outcropping," answered Lucky Larry Donovan, "and I reckon it gives you some idea what the strike will be like when I *do* hit it, eh?"

Old Jules knew Donovan too well to think that he was exaggerating.

"Donovan's luck!" he said again. "Rich because you believed an Indian who had a loose tongue from the too-much liquor that was inside him! Myself, I did not believe; I thought you just one big fool that you would give up your trapping and go looking for this gold. To any one but Lucky Donovan it could not happen! Life, she is funny." He gave the young man a quizzical stare. "And what shall you be doing with yourself, eh, Larry, when you are rich?"

"Oh, there's time enough to think of that," Lucky Larry Donovan answered with a careless shrug of his broad shoulders. "Besides, I haven't found the real deposit yet. It might be across the creek, on Hamlin's property; I don't think so, Jules, but as I said before—gold's where you find it."

Jules LeBlanc pinched the lobe of his right ear,—an absent-minded mannerism of his.

"Hamlin? You would mean that chechahco from Nevada or some place that was here that night the Indian was drunk, the crazy fool who accused you of cheating at cards, when you beat his full house with four kings?"

"The very same," nodded Larry Donovan; "he's staked himself a claim across the creek from mine."

"And good friends by this time, maybe?" suggested Jules.

Donovan shook his head regretfully.

"No fault of mine we're not," he answered. "It's pretty tough, two fellows living within hailing distance of each other and never speaking a word—and not another human being within forty miles. I've tried to be friendly, but Hamlin won't have it." He laughed without much humor. "I imagine he sleeps with his gun under his pillow for fear I'm going to knife him in his bed and jump his claim."

Jules LeBlanc wagged a wise forefinger.

"You be careful of that fellow," he warned, "or it would be you, Larry Donovan, who gets a knife through the ribs. When a man is so suspicious with other people, he bears watching. Evil men think evil. It is not easy to fool

Jules LeBlanc and, mark my words, that Hamlin came to this country to get away from something, to lose himself."

Lucky Larry Donovan frowned thoughtfully.

"I guess it did look *too* lucky, my drawing four cards against a pat hand and filling four kings—and me dealing the cards. One of those wild, crazy hunches I get sometimes. Anyhow, Hamlin's convinced himself that he saw me dealing from the bottom of the deck."

Old Jules, who asked nothing better as a diversion than a good fist fight, chuckled at the recollection of the clash following Hamlin's accusation that Donovan was a crook and a cheat. Hamlin had been a little drunk, but he had fought gamely, taking tremendous punishment before admitting defeat.

"It was a handsome conflict, my boy, but I say to you again that it is wise for you to be careful with that fellow. I know pelts and I know men, and this Hamlin stores up hate in his heart."

Larry Donovan took a paper from his pocket.

"Here is a list of the supplies I'll be wanting to take back with me," he said, "and now I'll climb the hill and see what Pierre Deru's widow is having for dinner."

"There is a letter here for Hamlin," said Jules; "it came a week after he left. Would you want to take it with you?"

Donovan nodded and turned toward the door. An alien sound beat steadily through the stillness; he paused, listening, and Jules LeBlanc smiled proudly.

"Jules gets modern in his old age, eh?" the latter chuckled. "Yes, a motor boat that makes the trip from Sainte Marie in three hours. Wait a minute and see for yourself what a fine launch this trading post has got to fetch in supplies!"

Because the old trader would be hurt otherwise, Larry Donovan waited. The sturdy *putt-putt* of the one-lunged, heavy-duty engine became louder until the explosions reverberated like artillery fire across the lake. Then the boat itself plowed into view around the tip of Beaver Point.

Larry Donovan's mouth dropped slightly open in a gape of surprise, but it was not the novelty of seeing a motor boat on Big Moose Lake for the first time that thus affected him. He had seen motor boats before, both bigger and better ones than this. A girl sat in the stern, and a strange girl, young and pretty, unless the distance lent illusion, coming to this wilderness trading post —that was a novelty.

Even Jules was amazed.

"Huh!" he grunted, shading his eyes with the shield of his hand. "And what would you make of this, Mr. Donovan?"

Lucky Larry Donovan did not answer, only stared. The explosions of the engine abruptly ceased, and the boat, piled high with freight, was being allowed to glide toward the dock at rapidly slackening speed. The female passenger was no disappointment to the eyes at closer range.

Larry Donovan suddenly became acutely conscious of the three days' growth of beard upon his face. His palm scraped across his stubbled chin and then he abruptly strode off the porch and turned up the hill toward the house of Pierre Deru's widow, but now he was less interested in a hot, home-cooked dinner than he was in getting the loan of a razor.

CHAPTER II.

A PREDICTION.

ONLY some urgent and compelling reason would account for a young woman coming into this wilderness country alone, and Jules LeBlanc, watching the newcomer speculatively as

she disembarked from the launch and stood for a moment on the wharf—a slimly graceful figure in a plaid sport skirt and a white sweater, topped with a red tam—wondered what that reason might be. Since plausible explanations were extremely limited, it was perhaps natural that he should very quickly associate her arrival with the young fellow, Hamlin, whom he suspected of being a fugitive.

The girl came swiftly up the narrow plank walk to the store, and Jules saw that her face was tense, her eyes anxious. She did not speak until she had mounted the porch steps and stood directly facing the old fur trader.

"I am looking for my brother, Paul Hamlin," she said. "Do you know where I can find him?"

"If you asked me that half an hour ago," answered old Jules, "I would say to you, 'No'; but now, mam'selle, I can tell you, 'Yes.'"

"You mean—he is not here? Please tell me quickly—is he safe and well? I have been greatly concerned. He did not answer my letter——"

Jules LeBlanc pointed northward.

"Mail does not follow where your brother has gone, mam'selle. A week before your letter came he took a guide, a great many supplies, and went in search of gold. Only this morning Larry Donovan came in, and he has seen your brother, knows where he can be found. Larry Donovan will carry back any message——"

"But I don't want to send a message," the girl interrupted. "I must see my brother personally, and I shall go myself."

Old Jules smiled faintly.

"Not so easy done as said, mam'selle. The lake ends here. It's float and carry."

"I'm not so sure I know exactly what that means."

"By canoe where there is water, and then on foot until you reach the next stream. It is no trip for a woman, mam'selle."

The girl's mouth set into a stubborn line of determination, and her eyes flashed.

"Perhaps women are not so helpless as you think! If my brother got there then I'll get there, too. He hired a guide and so will I."

The older trader shook his head.

"A month ago a guide could have been had at five dollars the day; now there is not a man but is away, busy with his traps and his gun."

Only for an instant did Hamlin's sister look defeated.

"What about this Donovan you mentioned?" she inquired. "If he could take a message to my brother, why couldn't he take me with him?"

The reason old Jules had not himself suggested that solution of her problem was that he reasoned Larry Donovan would want to travel light and fast in his eagerness to get back to his gold discovery. Summer was on the wane, and it would not be many weeks more that the claim could be worked. Once Larry struck the vein his time might easily be worth a thousand dollars a day, if the strike lived up to the promise of the outcroppings.

The girl was quick to note Jules LeBlanc's hesitation.

"Is there any reason why this Donovan should not take me with him?" she demanded.

"Only, mam'selle, that he would be in a hurry to get back, and taking a woman along would lose him not less than two days' time."

"Oh, I would be willing to pay for the inconvenience," she said crisply. "Five dollars, I believe you said, is the customary day's pay for a guide. Very well, I'll give double that. I must get to my brother immediately!"

Old Jules suppressed a smile. She doubtless thought she was being very generous with her offer of ten dollars

a day, but Jules was thinking it not unlikely that Larry Donovan would soon be able to count his wealth in six figures. But he said nothing, knowing that Larry had shown him the nuggets in confidence.

There came the sound of heavy boots thudding rapidly down the plank walk, and a moment later Larry Donovan, wearing the world's fastest shave, bulked largely in the doorway of the store. White flecks of drying soap in the rim of one ear made it evident that he had used the borrowed razor with much haste. A much less shrewd man than Jules Le Blanc would have been able to add up this particularly simple two-and-two.

"What a jolt the lad is going to have," thought Jules, "when he hears she is sister to the man to whom he gave a beating!"

Larry Donovan got his jolt quickly.

"This is Mr. Donovan, mam'selle," said Jules.

The girl gave Larry an appraising look which ended in a smile.

"I understand, Mr. Donovan, that you are the one man who can help me. I am trying to reach my brother——"

Before she could finish, Larry guessed her identity, and momentarily such a panic-stricken look came into his face that she could not miss seeing it. A gasp of alarm escaped her.

"Is—is there something wrong?" she stammered, her voice dropping to an anxious whisper. "Is there something I haven't been told?"

Larry Donovan recovered himself quickly.

"Hamlin's your brother, isn't he? I sort of guessed that somehow. No, nothing wrong, Miss Hamlin, and your brother's all right. I saw him Tuesday."

"You looked so startled that I was afraid—— Please do not try to deceive me out of kindness; that would be unfair."

"Reckon I was just surprised," said Larry Donovan, soothing her apprehension.

"I must reach Paul immediately," the girl went on firmly, "and I am told there are no guides to be had—unless I can persuade you to take me along with you. I expect, of course, to pay generously for the inconvenience and the delay."

"It's a long trip, Miss Hamlin, and a hard one," Donovan warned her.

"I think you will find me equal to it," she answered with spirit. "And I promise not to complain. It is very important, Mr. Donovan—vital; please do not refuse me."

"We don't refuse requests like yours up in this country," Larry told her; "nor do we take pay for doing a favor for the sister of a—well, a neighbor."

The girl offered him a slim, strong hand and gave with it a smile of gratitude that made Larry Donovan's heart bound and then sink heavily.

"I don't know how to thank you, Mr. Donovan, and so I won't try."

Larry stepped to the doorway and pointed up the hill.

"You'll want your dinner before we start," he said. "The second cabin, Miss Hamlin, is where Pierre Deru's widow cooks the best food anywhere north of Seattle. While you're eating I'll get my supplies together and down on the dock."

He watched her for a moment as she went swiftly up the hill, and then turned to catch old Jules smiling.

"That's right—grin!" he muttered dolefully. "A great joke on me, isn't it? The only girl I've ever wanted to make a hit with, and she's got to be Hamlin's sister! What he won't tell her about me, eh? A fine chance I'll have by the time he gets through blackguarding me!"

Jules LeBlanc chuckled.

"Never before," he laughed, "have I ever seen Larry Donovan discouraged

about anything. Shame on you for having so faint a heart! Where would be the Donovan luck!"

"It turned on me that night, right here in this room, when I filled four kings against Hamlin's full house," Larry answered morosely. "What good is a little luck that fails a fellow when it come to what he really wants?"

Jules LeBlanc continued chuckling.

"Right now," he predicted, "I would stake my whole trading business that before another spring thaw Lucky Larry Donovan will be a bridegroom. So sure I am, lad, that I would save out the best sables for a wedding present."

CHAPTER III.

A MYSTERIOUS DISAPPEARANCE.

"SITKA PETE," an Indian half-breed with bad white blood in his veins, had gone on a drunken rampage and killed his squaw. The murder had been without motive, but also without justification. Although there had been no witnesses, Sitka Pete, crafty as he was, knew that his cunning was no match for the intelligent perseverance of the Royal Northwest Mounted. Flight was natural, even though it might be futile. Light and elusive as a shadow moving through dense foliage, he had fled Sitka Basin, terror his only companion, with no objective other than to avoid those scarlet-coated white men who never relented and seldom failed.

So hard and fast had Sitka Pete traveled that even the endurance which had been his heritage from his Indian forbears had been strained to the limit. What little food he had brought with him was exhausted; his limited supply of ammunition was spent, making his gun useless; and, as an added calamity, he had driven the bottom of his canoe against a jagged rock, tearing a gaping hole which defied all ingenuity in making repairs since he had no tools with which to do the work.

For two days he had lived on the raw meat of a rabbit that he had trapped, and it was a desperate Sitka Pete who sat sullenly on a rock, looking no less evil than he was, staring down from Otter Island to the turbulent, foam-churned race of water that was White Horse River. He cursed in a guttural monotone as he despondently debated his situation.

Otter Island was a small place, washed on either side by the swift rush of the river. At some time in the past it had attracted the fancy of a trapper who had built on it a rough, one-room shack of logs, but it had now been long deserted. A shelter was no particularly attractive luxury to Sitka Pete, for he was, at this time of the year, quite as content to live in the open. What had recommended the island to him was that it offered a vantage point from which he could be forewarned of any unwelcome approach.

Sitka Pete's ears had Indian keenness. Suddenly his head jerked up and the muscles beneath his copper-hued skin snapped taut. He had heard, far in the distance, the sound of a human voice, coming to him so faintly that he was not at first sure but that it had been a subtle trick of the imagination, of his fear.

He leaped to his feet and darted into the brush without leaving one snapped twig to mark the path he had taken. Swiftly but with no relaxing of a caution that was a primitive instinct with him, he slipped forward to a spot where he could see even farther up the stream. Again a voice reached him, and this time it was the laugh of a woman he heard, tinkling with musical clearness in the wilderness silence. This both puzzled and reassured him; it puzzled him for the reason that no Indian squaw ever laughed like that, and no other women were to be found in this desolate fastness, and it reassured him because this was ample proof that it was

not one of the scarlet-coated king's policemen hunting him down.

Sitka Pete crouched forward, peering through the brush, now more curious than alarmed. Presently the approaching canoe, riding deep in the water from the load of two passengers and a considerable cargo, leaped into view, racing with the hard pull of the current. It was treacherous water where the river parted to circle Otter Island, and the half-breed, watching, eyed with grudging admiration the way the young man handled the paddle. Half white himself, Sitka Pete hated all white men; by some strange mental twist he particularly hated those who could attract beautiful women by reason of their good looks or their prowess. He saw that the girl in the canoe was unusually attractive. With eyes narrowed to beady slits, Sitka Pete watched this superb creature, his lips parted, baring broken yellow teeth.

Had Larry Donovan been traveling alone he would not have thought of making camp so early, but he knew that Clara Hamlin was very weary although she tried to conceal how tired she was, and not a word of complaint had she uttered. There had been a long, hard struggle across a steep divide, and she had insisted upon carrying her own bundle. Game, this girl; game as they're made. Larry's admiration and adoration of her had been growing by the hour, almost by the minute.

Larry Donovan knew Otter Island, and he was aware of the abandoned one-room cabin. There was indication, to a man wise in the ways of the weather, that it would rain before morning. Also, the shack had a stove of a sort, and at this season of the year the nights called for a fire. All these things taken into consideration, he decided to call it a day and make camp on Otter Island.

Shooting the laden canoe over the rapids with expert steadiness of head and hand while Clara Hamlin held her breath, Larry steered for the little cove which he knew promised the easiest landing.

"I reckon we'll call it a day, Miss Hamlin, and head in here," he announced.

The girl glanced at the sky and saw that it would still be some time before nightfall; she looked at Donovan and knew that this young man of steel would have gone farther except for consideration of her comfort. She was tired, very tired, and her cramped muscles almost cried aloud in agony, but she smiled the bravest smile she could manage.

"Please, Mr. Donovan, you mustn't think of me. You're in a hurry, you know, and honestly, I'm not nearly at the end of my string. Why don't we push on until dark?"

"I generally stop here," Larry told her glibly.

"I'm pretty sure you're only trying to save my pride, Mr. Donovan."

He answered that with a laugh and pointed the nose of the canoe to a low spot of the shore where the craft could be pulled clear of the water with a minimum of effort.

From his hiding place in the brush above, Sitka Pete watched the landing of the pair, hardly able to believe his good fortune. This white man had everything that he wanted—guns and ammunition, food, and, not least important, a canoe. The half-breed's eyes gleamed and his breath hissed softly through his broken teeth.

"Liquor!" whispered Sitka Pete. "Mebbe heem got liquor!"

This was a reasonable assumption, for seldom did a white man travel far without whisky for an emergency. Without a sound the half-breed retreated until darkness should close down and offer him a more favorable opportunity for satisfying his needs.

Unaware that Otter Island had another occupant, Larry Donovan helped

Clara Hamlin ashore. She staggered stiffly, her benumbed muscles for a moment useless.

"I might as well own up," she admitted with a wan smile; "I'm glad you stopped. I guess you think I'm a terrible tenderfoot—but they don't call a greenhorn that up here, do they? Chechahco, isn't it?"

"You're the gamest sort ever, that's what you are!" Larry exclaimed warmly. "Now you roam about a bit and get the kinks out while I haul up the boat. Hungry? You must be by this time."

"I—I don't really know," she answered, and not to feel hunger after a hard day on the trail is the ultimate of fatigue. More than ever the girl marveled at Larry Donovan's superb strength. Canoe and supplies weighing, she did not know how much, he had carried for a tremendous distance —seven or eight miles, she was very sure—and there was no noticeable ebb in his vitality.

A few minutes later, having made their little craft secure for the night and covering the supplies with canvas in anticipation of rain, Larry was ready to lead the way up the steep path ahead and to the cabin above. It took all the strength she could summon to go staggering up after him, the path making it necessary to go single file. Anyhow, his arms were too full with her bedding and the food for supper to give her a hand.

The shack, of course, was a crude affair and built in rough haste, but there was the small stove, a sleeping bunk, and a table of a sort.

"Now you cache yourself right here while I rustle the grub," Larry said cheerfully as he unrolled the blanket and spread it across the bunk. Clara Hamlin shook her head in refusal, for she was certain that once she surrendered to her weariness she would be finished for the night.

"No," she responded, "getting supper is *my* job, Mr. Donovan."

Larry knew that she was unequal to the determination, but he admired her grit. He produced a bottle, took a collapsible cup from his pocket, and poured out a modest drink.

"You'd better have this then," he told her; "it'll brace you up and give you an appetite. Without plenty of food you won't be able to stand the pace."

Almost violently she pushed the cup away.

"If you knew how much misery and anguish that has brought me—no, I wouldn't drink it if I were dying!" she exclaimed.

Larry surmised this had some reference to her brother; he had seen Paul Hamlin "hitting the booze" that night of the unfortunate poker game. He poured the whisky back into the bottle; it was too precious for wasting and, more than once, he had seen it save a man's life.

"All right," he said gently, "but you sit down and rest until I've made the coffee; I reckon that'll buck you up some."

Clara Hamlin hesitated for an instant and then obeyed him; a moment later the temptation to stretch herself at full length was so overpowering that she lay down. Her eyes closed and consciousness faded in a much-needed sleep.

Larry had left his rifle in the canoe, but wore a .45-caliber revolver in a holster at his hip. He unbuckled the gun belt and hung it from a peg on the wall near the window. Abruptly he changed his plan about building a fire at once, in order to let Clara slumber undisturbed; so he tiptoed to the doorway, sat down on the sill, and, as the twilight gathered, stared at her as he would not have dared had she been awake and her eyes open.

"Maybe if I was to tell her just how things stand between her brother and me, before she gets his slant on it, she

would understand——" Carefully he debated this problem at great length.

Not until darkness had completely closed in did he set about building a fire in the rusted stove, and Clara Hamlin slept on through the noise of breaking sticks and, a little later, the simmering of the bacon and the rattling dance of the coffeepot upon the uneven top of the cracked stove. It must have been the aroma of the cooking food that penetrated her consciousness. Suddenly she sat up, wide awake and distinctly hungry. Two stubs of candle burned on the table.

"I really didn't intend to fall asleep!" she exclaimed contritely. "Getting the supper should have been my job!"

"Well, we won't quarrel about that now," laughed Larry. "How's your appetite?"

"Simply ravenous!"

"Figured it would, so I've cooked plenty." He picked up the table and moved it toward the bunk so that she could use it for a seat. There was, except for a rough, three-legged stool, no other place to sit.

So far during the trip there had been no personalities in their conversation, and oddly enough, no mention of her brother whatever.

"Perhaps you can tell me something I want to know," she said, pouring Larry his third cup of coffee. "How good is the chance of Paul finding gold?" The suppressed tone of her voice told Larry Donovan that getting money was a matter of vital importance to the Hamlins.

"That's a hard question to answer," he replied. "I reckon you've heard the saying, 'Gold is where you find it.' There's color along the creek that your brother and I are working, and it would be safe to say that the prospect is encouraging. Still, Miss Hamlin, a little color doesn't make a strike; it's all luck, ma'am, just plain luck."

"Yes, I understand," she nodded, and dropped the subject much too soon for Larry's liking, for he had hoped that here was an opening to put her right about himself. Extraordinarily quick-witted in most matters, he found himself groping helplessly for the right words; the wrong ones, he feared, might do more harm than good. If she would only give him an opening by saying something like, "I suppose you and Paul have become very good friends," it would be easier.

The night wind had freshened to a stiff breeze, but still it seemed hardly strong enough to push open the square, hinged window with such violence. The two candles on the table were snuffed out, leaving Larry and Clara sitting in complete darkness except for a crack of light from the stove. The girl gave a startled gasp and laughed.

"Hello," said Larry Donovan, reaching for a match, "it looks as though we're going to have our storm sooner than I'd expected."

As he relighted one of the candles, protecting the wavering flame with the screen of his hands, Clara leaped to her feet and closed the window. Neither of them noticed that during those few seconds of darkness Donovan's .45 had mysteriously vanished from the holster hanging on a wooden peg in the wall.

CHAPTER IV.

QUICK EYES.

A SKULKING, sinister figure, his ghostly, woods-wise feet making no sound, Sitka Pete had emerged from the brush where he had been waiting for the friendly blackness of a starless night. Silent as the shadows of the pine trees, even more silent than the trees themselves which whispered in the rising breeze, the half-breed made his way toward the cabin where the white pair had established camp. The wind bore to his sensitive nostrils the tantalizing and irresistible aroma of hot food and steaming coffee. His hunger was

like some clawing thing, tearing at his vitals.

The light from the cabin guided him, and when he was yet some distance away his approach became even more cautious. The white man would be armed and would, Sitka Pete reasoned, challenge all his cunning. Now he could hear the man and the woman talking, although what they might be saying to each other was of no interest to him. His progress was literally by inches, and he approached the window side of the shack. Very slowly his body rose outside the log wall until his eyes were level with the bottom of the grimy pane of glass.

Sitka Pete's pulse bounded with excitement and his blood raced hot through his veins as he saw the bottle of whisky on the table. Even his hunger became secondary to the craving for a taste of this "fire water." His very throat seemed to ache with desire for the stuff. It was all he could do to suppress the guttural exclamation that rose to his lips.

Outside the dirt-filmed window and with only candlelight within, there was not much danger of his being seen, and Sitka Pete's face pressed closer to the glass. He wanted to see if the white man wore his gun, and an instant later his beady eyes rested upon the butt of the weapon, no more than a hand's reach from where he stood—if the window had been open.

The half-breed was cunning. He noticed how the flame of the two burning candles danced and flickered, and he knew that it would take little to extinguish them entirely. He had, of course, no way of knowing if the window were securely fastened from the inside, but if it would yield to the push of a hand he knew how he could get possession of the weapon.

Sitka Pete's head dropped below the level of the window. One arm lifted, and he gave the frame a quick shove. The result was all that he had hoped for, more than he had expected, for the hinged window swung inward with practically no resistance, and the cabin was instantly in complete darkness. The half-breed's fingers darted out and swiftly plucked the .45 from its leather holster. Down he dropped again, this time flat to the ground, and crawled stealthily through the grass, around the corner of the cabin.

Totally unaware of the menace, having no thought other than that they had Otter Island to themselves, Larry Donovan sweetened his third cup of coffee and tried to bring the subject back to his companion's brother.

"I reckon he'll be right glad to see you—and maybe some surprised, too," he ventured.

"Yes—both," she answered with a brevity that was discouraging, and Larry saw that her eyes had clouded with a troubled look. For whatever reason, she was deeply worried over Paul. Very likely old Jules LeBlanc was right in the opinion that Paul Hamlin had run away from something.

Evidently it was a matter of money, for the girl was deeply concerned over the prospects of her brother's striking gold, and Hamlin himself had been working his claim with a fervor that hinted at desperation. With what success Larry did not know.

Larry dug out his pipe from a capacious pocket, filled it with tobacco and, matches being precious, leaned forward to light it with the flame of the candle. Only one puff had he taken when he heard the whine of a rusted hinge and swung about to see the sagging door being pushed open. The wind was not doing this. In the space of a split second he had darted an arm toward his gun, only to find with amazement and consternation that the weapon was missing.

The next instant the leering face of Sitka Pete appeared from out of the

shadows behind him, an evil face with the thin lips parted into a wolfish grin, baring his discolored, broken teeth.

Larry recognized the .45 in the half-breed's hand as his own revolver, and it took no great leap of imagination to guess in what fashion the gun had vanished from its holster.

"Steek 'em oup—queek!" snarled Sitka Pete, and it would have been suicide not to have obeyed instantly. Larry Donovan's arms rose until his wrists were level with his ears. Clara Hamlin had made no outcry, but her eyes had dilated with sudden terror, for she knew that here was a man to fear, more beast than human.

"What do you want?" snapped Donovan. "If it's food, you don't have to come at us with a gun to get it. Put down that revolver, you fool, before you get the Northwest Mounted on your trail!"

Under other circumstances this might have worked, but, since Sitka Pete was already police quarry, the threat was useless. What is one crime more when already the noose of the law dangles before a hunted man's eyes? The half-breed sucked his breath unpleasantly through his teeth. His beady eyes burned past Larry's shoulder to the bottle of whisky on the edge of the table.

"You go there—with 'oman," he ordered, motioning that Donovan was to join the girl on the bunk, and again Larry had no choice but to obey. His muscles were tight, waiting for a chance to catch the half-breed off guard.

Sitka Pete occupied the chair that Larry had vacated, and made a grab for the bottle, pulling the cork with his teeth in order to keep the drop on the other two. He tilted the bottle to his mouth and the red, fiery stuff went down his throat. On an empty stomach the effect was instantaneous, and his first reaction was to feel very happy, although his laugh was not a pleasant thing to hear.

"Me hungry," he grunted; "white man's 'oman cook plenty grub—queek."

Larry knew that the whisky would make the half-breed even more vicious, unleash all the primitive savagery of his nature; but he hoped, also, that the liquor would befuddle his wits.

"Shall—shall I do it?" whispered Clara Hamlin.

"I'll cook the grub for you, and you're welcome to anything we've got," said Larry to Sitka Pete.

A look of supreme contempt flitted across the half-breed's face. That was the way of these fool white men, doing the work that belong to the hands of their women. Catch an Indian getting food when there was a squaw around!

There was a motive in what Larry Donovan did; he wanted to be on his feet and moving about, for it would give him a better opportunity to engineer a surprise attack. Sitka Pete took another drink from the bottle and moved the stool so that his back would be to the wall, the naturally strategic position. His eyes now gleamed and burned like two flaming coals in his swarthy face.

Clara Hamlin shrank back in nameless terror from the glittering stare. In fascinated fear, she watched him pick up a scrap of bread from one of the tin plates, swab it in cold bacon grease, and wash it down with a third prodigious drink of whisky. The bottle was now half empty.

Imploringly her eyes sought Larry's, begging him to do something, although she could not see what he *could* do. Silent, watching every movement the half-breed made, Larry Donovan wondered how he would meet the situation. Not for an instant had Sitka Pete's gun hand relinquished its cautious grip on the .45. The liquor was not, as Larry had hoped, making him careless.

"If I can get within arm's reach of him, I might have a fighting chance," thought Larry, and for once in his life

he wished that he were a Canuck and a master of the *savette,* which is foot boxing. Once he had seen a French-Canadian kick a cocked gun from a man's hand so quickly that the other had no chance to fire.

Cudgeling his brain for some scheme to outwit the half-breed, Donovan's eyes suddenly became fixed upon the black-pepper tin on a wooden shelf back of the stove. The next instant he had got it in his hand, slipping it swiftly into the pocket of his lumber jacket.

"Be more queek wit' zat grub," growled Sitka Pete, sniffing hungrily.

Larry took a step forward, the hot skillet in which a fresh batch of bacon was still sizzling preceding him. Perhaps Sitka Pete anticipated that the white man might fling the hot grease at him; the gun lifted menacingly in warning. Donovan put the frying pan on the table and stepped back half a pace, his body half turned to conceal the movement of his right hand which slid gently into his pocket, and with his thumb nail he pried loose the top of the pepper can. He thought he was being very crafty about it, but the .45 became a thing alive with death. The muzzle spat lead and flame, and the roar seemed to shake the cabin to its very foundation.

Larry Donovan's face wore a strange, dazed expression. One hand lifted and pressed against the breast of his lumber jacket, covering the hole that marked the path of the bullet, and then, his knees sagging, he crashed down to the floor, and lay flat on his face. The heavy laced boots scraped noisily over the rough boards as his legs twitched—and then his body was quite still, his eyes closed.

Sitka Pete laughed raucously, as though it were a great joke.

"Heem try tricks wit' Sitka Pete, huh? Sitka Pete got much queek eye to see tricks wit', you bet!"

Clara Hamlin had not screamed; horror seemed to paralyze even her vocal cords as she stared down at Larry Donovan. He had been her one hope, and now she was at the mercy of the half-breed.

CHAPTER V.

TWO BLOWS.

PUTTING down the gun, Sitka Pete began eating from the frying pan with his fingers, each mouthful being accompanied by another drink from the bottle. His grimy face glistened and he wiped his dripping fingers on the sleeves of his tattered deerskin jacket. More frequently he stared and grinned at the girl, and she tried to think that it was the gold bracelet on her wrist that fascinated him. She made a nervous movement to take it off, but her fingers trembled so that she could hardly open the clasp.

"Would you like to have this?" she asked faintly, and put it on the edge of the table. A grunt was the half-breed's only response and he ignored the bauble as he pushed back the three-legged stool. Clara shrank back and unconsciously doubled her fists. The table hemmed her in, making any attempt to reach the door impossible.

Sitka Pete staggered slightly as he got to his feet, picked up the gun and shoved it under the waistband of his ragged trousers. He took a swaggering step forward and stood above the prostrate white man, prodding Donovan's body with the toe of a buckskin moccasin.

"Plenty much dead," he said with superior elation. "When Sitka Pete shoot, he keel."

Clara Hamlin tore herself loose from the grip of fear. Here was her chance—the only chance she was likely to have. The half-breed's back was turned, and she remembered what had happened to the flickering candles when the window had been opened. She could duplicate that trick, but with a variation, for there was no way she could reach the window

before attracting attention. With the cabin in the darkness she might be able to reach the door and escape.

Her hand darted out, swept up one of the tin plates, and fanned out violently. It worked! The dancing flame vanished, leaving blackness.

That instant she realized how utterly helpless and hopeless was her situation, for even if she eluded the half-breed and reached the beached canoe in time to get hold of Larry Donovan's rifle, she was marooned on the island, unable to manage the frail craft in the swift, racing waters of the river, and also at the mercy of the trackless wilderness. Nevertheless, she rushed to her feet, determined to have a try for it. Anything, even death, was bettetr than being alone with the whisky-crazed Sitka Pete.

A hoarse, guttural bellow of anger came from the half-breed, and then sounds which Clara Hamlin could not understand—the impact of meeting bodies and the cabin suddenly quaking with the fierceness of a hand-to-hand struggle. Grunts, hard breathing, Sitka Pete cursing, the thudding of booted feet—and the Indian wore no boots! What did it mean? Dazed, Clara dropped back to the bunk, straining her eyes against the impenetrable blackness. It must be Donovan, it had to be Donovan—but how could it be?

Seconds dragged themselves into minutes, and then came another shot; this one dull and muffled. A horrible, blood-chilling scream, followed by one anguished instant of silence.

"It—it's all right—now, Miss Hamlin."

Yes, that panting voice of reassurance was Larry Donovan's! A match scratched, a triangle of flame leaped into life, illuminating Larry's grim face with a trickle of crimson oozing down his cheek.

"That was clever of you, putting out the light," he said; "it gave me the chance I was waiting for." He relighted the candle and considerately stood between her and the inert Sitka Pete.

"I—I don't understand," the girl stammered, her voice faint and tremulous. "I—I thought——" Her words trailed off, her eyes fixed upon the bullet hole in the breast of his old lumber jacket.

Larry Donovan's face lost some of its tenseness. His hand slid beneath the jacket and reappeared with a thick, old-fashioned silver watch. He held it up to her bewildered stare. A bullet had penetrated the back of the case.

"Got a habit of carrying this old biscuit in the pocket of my shirt," he explained, "and that's what saved me, Miss Hamlin. It gave me some jolt at that; a .45 packs quite a kick. It floored me and I couldn't figure out for a couple of seconds why I wasn't breathing my last. Knew the Injun would let me have it again if I didn't play dead doggie, but I didn't expect to get away with it at that. If the copper rascal had been cold sober he'd have seen I was shamming on him."

"It—it's almost unbelievable!" gasped Clara Hamlin. "It's a miracle! Small wonder they call you Lucky Larry Donovan!" She became aware that the gun was back in his possession and that from the half-breed there came neither move nor sound. "He—is he dead? Did—did you have to—to kill him?"

Larry Donovan turned his head and stared down at Sitka Pete.

"Yes, Miss Hamlin, I reckon he's dead, and while he's not much to grieve about, I'm glad it was his finger on the trigger. You see, he had the gun and I had his wrists, so I guess—well, I guess we'll just call it an accident."

"But you're hurt, Mr. Donovan!"

Larry wiped the back of his hand across his cheek.

"It's only a scratch, where he dug me with his finger nails. Now if you'll —um—look the other way, Miss Ham-

lin, I'll get him outside so you can turn in for the night."

The girl, who had borne up with remarkable courage, found herself on the verge of hysteria, the price of the reaction, and needed no urging to avoid looking at the dead man. Head averted and her eyes closed, she heard the clump of Larry Donovan's boots on the floor, all the heavier for the limp, sagging burden that he carried. The footsteps faded, going down the path. All was still, and there was only the rustling whisper of the pines and the murmuring song of the rushing river until, without warning, the storm that Larry Donovan had predicted broke above the wilderness in a sharp, splitting crack of thunder. It was terrifying like the explosion of a gun. Clara Hamlin's nerves snapped as, with a moaning cry, she felt herself swimming in a sea of suffocating blackness; then she slid from the bunk to her knees and pitched forward to the floor in a dead faint.

So Larry Donovan found her when he returned to the cabin. His whole being thrilled and trembled as he picked her up in his arms to lift her on the bunk. Unconsciously he held her a little more tightly to him. Would he ever have the right to hold her close to him like this? Her face was very near, her lips ever so slightly parted, and Larry's emotions were whipped to a high pitch from the danger that both of them had so narrowly escaped. Warmly and yet almost reverently he lowered his face to hers and kissed her.

At this unfortunate moment—direfully unfortunate for Larry Donovan—Clara Hamlin's senses returned from oblivion, as though she had been the sleeping beauty of the fairy story. The rest, however, was not so satisfactorily romantic. Her eyes flashed open and began to blaze with a withering scorn, and Larry's face flamed with miserable embarrassment. He let her slip from his arms to her feet as he mumbled a guilty something about being sorry. He could have done no worse than to apologize; it would have been wiser had he blurted out the truth, for it never angers a woman to be told that she has stirred the emotion of an honest love.

Violently she pushed away from him, and her tongue lashed him with two stinging words:

"You cad!"

Larry winced as though she had struck him and, indeed, the hurt of a blow would have been less. Without making any response, he turned away so quickly that she did not see the anguished expression of his face, and had she seen it she would not have so cruelly misjudged him.

CHAPTER VI.

BROTHER AND SISTER.

THE remainder of the journey was a strangely and miserably silent one, the conversation being limited to the strict necessities. Poor Larry! Had he been half so wise in the ways of womankind as he was in the ways of the dumb animals of the wilderness, he might have quite simply restored harmony by simply telling her that he had kissed her because he loved her. Even if she had not further encouraged him, at least she would have forgiven him.

Her nerves, of course, had been overwrought with the ordeal of horror, and actually, perhaps, she was not so intensely displeased as she had appeared, but so long as Larry said nothing she could not retreat from her first attitude of anger. A proud girl could not consistently say to him the following morning, "It was quite all right for you to kiss me last night." And so the breach, which would have been easily healed by the right word from him, became a wider gulf between them.

Four days after they had left Jules LeBlanc's trading post, late in the afternoon, they came toward the end of their

journey, Larry paddling quietly upstream in the shallow and unhurried waters of the well-named Lazy Creek. Their canoe poked its nose around a curve and Larry Donovan pointed ahead.

"There's your brother's shack, Miss Hamlin; mine's farther on," he told her. "I reckon you'll catch sight of him most any minute now. He's generally to be found working his claim." He pointed again. "That's his sluice box over there."

Clara Hamlin leaned eagerly forward, her eyes searching for a first glimpse of her brother, and then she cupped her hands to her mouth and called. Sound carries a great distance in this forest stillness, but there was no response. The girl looked disappointed, a little anxious.

"He may have gone prospecting around somewhere," Donovan explained, "but he'll be showing up for supper pretty soon." Another broad sweep of the paddle sent the canoe gliding swift yards ahead and, as it slackened speed, nosing gently upon the small sandy beach. "I'll help you up to the cabin, Miss Hamlin," said Larry.

"Oh, I can manage quite well by myself, thank you—and I prefer to, if you please," she said coolly, beginning to gather up her things. She hesitated for a moment, and then added, "You may be assured, Mr. Donovan, that I shall say nothing to cause any friction between two neighbors—the only white men within miles and miles."

Because he could think of nothing to say and because there seemed nothing to be said, Larry hastily shoved the canoe back into the stream and viciously dug his paddle into the water.

"And they call *me* Lucky Larry Donovan!" he exclaimed bitterly under his breath. "I'm as lucky as a busted flush, but I guess it don't make much difference anyhow; she'd be plumb off of me anyhow after her brother gets through telling her what kind of a bird he thinks I am."

Clara Hamlin, carrying her two heavy bundles, ascended the slope to her brother's cabin. This was not the first time that white men had sought gold along Lazy Creek, and the shack had been built by Paul Hamlin's predecessor, who had prospected in vain, fled from the rigors of a wilderness winter, and never returned, leaving the shack to any one who might care to claim it.

The instant she stepped inside the door, the girl was depressed by the utter hopelessness of Paul's housekeeping, and he had always been so tidy at home! Everything was in a wild tumble and jumble, an unswept floor, unwashed dishes, grimy cooking pots. The atmosphere was one that spoke eloquently of a man with a chaotic mind, perhaps even a despairing one.

"Poor Paul!" she murmured, her eyes becoming moist. "Something tells me that I didn't come any too soon."

Briskly she began rolling up her sleeves to tackle the task of cleaning up the place, but it was a problem where to begin, and it took her five minutes or more to find a bar of soap.

The slowly gathering gray dusk of a northern twilight was closing in before she had completed the disagreeable job and she was just preparing to light the lantern, the glass chimney of which she had polished to a glistening brightness, when she discovered that it contained no kerosene and that, likewise, there was none in the cabin.

"That means candles," she told herself, and candles made her think of the terrible night on Otter Island—and of Larry Donovan. She smiled faintly in a moment of honesty and told herself that she had been no end silly to make such an issue of a stolen kiss. At this moment she glanced out the window and saw a man approaching.

"Is that Paul?" she gasped, staring at the bearded fellow who came rapidly

toward the shack. He looked so unkempt she was hardly able to believe that this was her brother, but as he came nearer there could be no mistake. She darted across the room and stood behind the door so that she would be concealed from view when it opened, making the surprise of her arrival all the more complete.

An instant later she could hear his plodding footsteps, walking like a man who was weary and discouraged. The door whined back on its hinges and Paul Hamlin struck a match. A sharp exclamation escaped him as he blinked at the unbelievable magic of the transformation Clara had effected, the dishes washed and the neatly made bunk.

Clara darted behind him before he could turn around and put her hands across his eyes.

"Guess who!" she cried. Recognizing her voice, he needed but one guess.

"Clara!" he shouted. "Clara! It—it can't really be you?"

Laughing excitedly, she caught her fingers in his beard and gave it a tug.

"Does that convince you I'm real?"

"Good lord, yes! But how—how did you get here?"

"Float and carry," she answered airily. "How vain you men are to think there's any place you can go that a woman can't follow! I waited and waited for you to answer my letter but——"

"I didn't get any letter."

"Yes, I found that out when I reached the trading post. Mr. LeBlanc gave it to me. But when you didn't answer, Paul, I simply had to come. Now you light the candles and we can talk while I'm getting us some supper. I've just finished cleaning up a bit."

Paul Hamlin flushed beneath the screen of his beard.

"Let the place get into a mess," he apologized. "The truth is, sis, I've been so dog tired every night that I just let everything go."

"Including yourself," she told him with the frankness that is allowed sisters. "Really, Paul, you look terrible, simply terrible!"

"The Indian I had decamped with my razor—and it's quite a few blocks down to the corner store, you know. I've been here absolutely alone except for the first week. The Indian was somebody to think out loud to, even if he didn't understand anything I said. Sometimes I've thought I couldn't stand it any longer."

Clara looked at him with an expression of surprise.

"There's been Mr. Donovan for you to talk with, surely," she said, and saw Paul's face darken. Instantly, of course, she knew that her brother thoroughly disliked Larry Donovan.

"So that's how you got here!" he exclaimed angrily. "You came with Donovan! I knew the dirty crook had gone after supplies. Didn't he tell you that he and I weren't on speaking terms?"

The girl shook her head.

"No, he didn't tell me that, Paul. We—well, we talked very little during the trip."

"So you got his number, too, did you? I'm glad of that, sis."

Clara Hamlin was thoughtful for a moment.

"I thought it best to keep him in his place," she said, "but I wouldn't have thought him dishonest. In what way is he a crook, Paul?"

"The lowest possible kind—a card sharper, a cheat," snapped Hamlin. "At the trading post they call him Lucky Larry Donovan." He laughed harshly. "Anybody can be lucky if he deals the cards from the bottom of the deck. I caught him at it—caught him cold. The fool! I suppose he thought his reputation for being lucky would save him from suspicion—even when he dealt himself four kings on a four-card draw!"

Clara caught her breath sharply.

"Paul! You broke the promise you made; you were gambling again. Oh, how could you, Paul, after all the misery——"

"It was only a small-limit game, sis. It wasn't a very big stake; it was the principle of the thing. To cut it short, I called Donovan by his right name and we had a battle. He near killed me, too, if you want to know. I was soft and easy meat for him to play the hero at the trading post. If I'd been in condition it might have been a different story."

That she should share her brother's feeling was but natural. Her eyes flashed resentfully, for how could she know that Paul had been quarrelsomely drunk and that Larry Donovan had tried to avoid the fight, almost to the point of losing his self-respect, and even then had used his fists only in self-defense. Before her mind flashed the imaginary picture of Larry Donovan, hardened of muscle and an easy victor, hammering Paul almost into insensibility. And this bully who had beaten up her brother had *dared* to kiss her! She felt a real fury now for that offense which she had been quite ready to forgive.

"I hope you paid him for bringing you," said Paul Hamlin; "I don't want to be under obligations to the fellow."

"That's what I wanted to do, but he refused, and I don't see how we can repay him, Paul, for the greatest service of all. He saved me from a drunken Indian——" Quickly she told him about Otter Island and Sitka Pete.

"Huh!" sneered Paul Hamlin. "He was thinking of his own skin as much as of saving you, and I guessed you saved *his* life when you fanned out the candle, so that squares it. Anyhow, let's not talk about the cheap crook; it makes me boiling mad, and he'd better stay out of my way!"

Clara went about getting supper while her brother got a pail of water from the creek and spruced himself up a bit. Having thus honored her presence, he sat down and stared at her moodily. Half a dozen times his lips moved before he finally asked the question that hovered upon his lips. There was a frightened look in his eyes.

"You—you didn't tell any one where I was, did you, sis?"

"I hardly would, do you think, Paul?"

"They—they've got a warrant out for me, I suppose?" he went on huskily.

"Not exactly a warrant, Paul," she said in a tremulous undertone; "the bank isn't going to do anything—for the present. The whole matter is in the hands of the district attorney, and the bank won't press for an indictment if the shortage is paid before the grand jury meets in November."

"It's October now," he reminded her with a groan. "Won't—won't old Faraday do anything to stave it off? I thought maybe if you put it up to him on—well, on a personal basis——"

Clara Hamlin's lips tightened and her eyes clouded.

"Isn't there some chance that you might be able to pay the money back yourself by November, Paul?" she asked him with a pleading, desperate note in her voice. "If you should make a rich strike——"

"If!" he exclaimed. "And spell it with capital letters!" He leaped to his feet, crossed the room, and returned with a glass bottle which had originally contained olives. Now it glittered with tiny yellow grains of gold.

"You have struck it!" she cried. "That is gold, isn't it?"

"This," Hamlin explained, "is what they call 'finding color.' It may mean that you're about to make a strike and it may mean that Dame Fortune is only handing you a laugh. How much would you think the stuff in this bottle is worth?"

"I really haven't the faintest idea, Paul."

"Free gold's worth twenty dollars an ounce, and I've got about twenty ounces of it. Just four hundred dollars, sis—and that's a long way from ten thousand. Over two months it's taken me to sluice this out of that creek—not even decent wages. To-day I went down the creek. No luck at all. It—it doesn't look very promising."

He began striding up and down, clenching and unclenching his hands. He laughed hollowly.

"One thing you can depend on, sis, I shan't add to your disgrace by letting 'em send me to prison. I was a fool, but I'll never be a jailbird. There's one way to beat that—the way I told you in my letter."

"Paul!" The girl's voice had dropped to an anguished whisper. "You—you wouldn't?"

Again his ragged, mirthless laugh beat against the walls of the cabin.

"Oh, I wouldn't, eh? Don't you think I'd rather be dead than have 'em take me back and send me up for five years—five years a living dead man? So help me, they'll not send *me* to prison!"

"That—that's why I came," gasped Clara Hamlin, her face gone dead white; "I was afraid that—that you might. I came to tell you, Paul, that even—even if you don't find enough gold to pay back the bank, Mr. Faraday has promised me there will be no—no prosecution."

"Well, if you aren't a fine one!" shouted Hamlin. "Why didn't you tell me that to begin with? I should think you could see I'm nearly crazy!"

Twisting her fingers nervously together, Clara did not speak for a moment.

"I didn't want to make it too easy for you, Paul," she told him after this pause; "I wanted you to try your utmost, to pay the money back yourself. You've always followed the line of least resistance; that's always been your trouble, and you—you don't seem to realize that if I let Mr. Faraday do this for us, I will have to marry him."

"Good lord, sis, why be so tragic about that?" Paul Hamlin exclaimed. "Faraday's got barrels of money, and the old codger is crazy about you besides."

Clara Hamlin stared at her brother intently for a moment and gestured wearily with her hands as a mirthless, pathetic smile faintly twitched the corners of her mouth.

"Yes," she responded, "that is quite true; but, as it happens, I'm not crazy about Mr. Faraday, a circumstance, however, which doesn't seem to concern any one except myself. It doesn't even concern you—does it, Paul?"

With that she abruptly turned her back upon him and silently went about getting supper. Oddly enough, she found herself wondering if Larry Donovan would let *his* sister—supposing he might have one—barter away her happiness like this? And an inner voice shouted back at her, "No!"

CHAPTER VII.

HANDS DOWN.

TWO weeks had passed since Clara Hamlin's arrival and she had spurred Paul's lagging hopes to the pitch of enthusiasm, working side by side with him on the claim. Paul, in his ignorance of hydraulics, had built his sluice box at a nearly dead-level stretch of the creek. Clara immediately saw that this was a mistake and set about finding a better method of washing the gravel. She did it so simply that her brother was deeply chagrined. By building a log dam across a narrow place in the creek, she raised the water level, giving a three-foot waterfall, which was funneled into the sluice box with the result that fully ten times as much gravel could be washed in the course of a day.

Hour after hour, from early dawn

until darkness made further operations impossible, the brother and sister worked side by side with feverish energy, and when Paul became tired and discouraged, Clara's tireless courage made him ashamed to quit.

The reward, however, was scant, and they had less than ten ounces of gold to pay for the grueling toil, hardly decent wages for the labor, as Paul had said. Still, Clara would not admit defeat.

"If we keep on trying," she stubbornly persisted, "we're going to make a strike." She stared up the creek. "I wonder what luck Donovan is having?"

Paul Hamlin laughed harshly.

"This is one game," he growled, "where a man can't deal from the bottom of the deck!"

Neither of them knew that at this moment Larry Donovan was watching their operations from some distance away. It was not the first time he had slipped quietly through the woods toward the Hamlin claim. With admiration, he had been a witness to the girl's ingenuity and common sense in building the dam to raise the creek level, and when he saw her incessant toiling he knew that it was some great necessity that drove her to this untiring labor. Voices carry far and clear in the forest stillness, and Larry was apprised, too, from complaining remarks made by Paul Hamlin, that the two were meeting with no success.

"She's got grit, that girl!" Larry exclaimed under his breath. "It's plain to see they need money and need it mighty bad—and it doesn't look like they're going to get it. When they've washed that much gravel and haven't hit it—well, they're in the wrong spot, that's all."

Donovan sat meditative for a few minutes and then he abruptly got to his feet and went striding forward to the creek. Clara Hamlin was the first to see him approach. She straightened, wiped her forehead with the back of her hand, and gave him a questioning stare, half surprised, half hostile. Didn't he know that his coming only meant having trouble with Paul?

"Morning, Miss Hamlin!" Larry greeted cheerfully. "Felt a little lonesome, so I thought I'd drop around. Getting to be a regular gold miner, aren't you? Having any luck?"

At the sound of Donovan's voice, Paul Hamlin, who had been working some yards down the creek, swung around, his eyes blazing. Gripping the handle of his shovel, he leaped forward.

"You get off my claim!" he shouted. "I give you fair warning, Donovan, get off—before I throw you off!"

"Paul, please!" cried Clara. "I am sure that Mr. Donovan has enough pride not to trespass where he is not wanted."

Larry Donovan's good nature abruptly departed. Both his mouth and his eyes hardened.

"Going to throw me off, are you, Hamlin? Think you're a better man than you were that night in LeBlanc's store, eh?" There was no mistaking the belligerence of his tone.

Paul Hamlin took a tighter grip about the shovel handle.

"This is my property, Donovan, and, moreover, I don't allow a card cheat to talk to my sister. I'm telling you for the last time—get!"

"I've never let a tenderfoot boss me around yet," snapped Larry, "and I reckon I'm in no mood to begin now. If you want a scrap, Hamlin, come on and get it." He unbuckled his gun belt and tossed the holster down. "Throw away your shovel and we'll say it with fists. I licked you once and I allow I'm able to do it again."

Paul Hamlin had an uncontrollable temper, and before Clara could interfere, he had leaped forward, swinging the shovel. It would have been a dangerous blow, had it landed, but Larry Donovan ducked with amazing quick-

ness, wrested the weapon from the other man's hand and lunged forward. His arm whipped forward, his iron-hard fist crashed wickedly against the point of Hamlin's jaw and the latter toppled over backward into a sprawling heap, all the fight jolted out of him.

Larry's pugilistic attitude did not relax.

"Get up!" he snapped. "You were the fellow who wanted a fight, and I aim to accommodate you—plenty."

Clara darted forward, picked up the fallen shovel, her eyes blazing.

"You brute—you bully!" she stormed. "Get off our claim."

"Now, if you was to ask me real nice and polite, Miss Hamlin——"

"I'm *ordering* you off!" she cried.

"It sort of seems," drawled Larry Donovan, "that you and your brother are a little mistaken in calling it your claim. Neglected to record it, I reckon. Jules LeBlanc is the recorder for this district, and that's what I went out for. I've got as much right where I'm standing as you have."

Paul Hamlin, raising himself to the support of one elbow, began edging himself toward Donovan's revolver, which lay upon the ground not more than a dozen feet away. Finally he was within arm's reach of it. His hand darted out, plucked the .45 from its holster, and he leaped wildly to his feet, his mind unbalanced by the insanity of anger.

"Curse you, Donovan——"

Clara screamed, the hammer of the gun lifted and fell, but there was no deadly explosion, only a faint metallic snapping, and Larry smiled grimly.

"I reckon it ain't loaded, Mr. Hamlin," he drawled, "and I reckon that's a pretty lucky thing—for both of us."

On his way to the creek Larry, as though he might have expected exactly such a situation, had broken the gun and dumped the cartridges into his pocket.

Paul Hamlin's senses cleared a little of the red mist that swam before his eyes. With a groan, as much of relief as defeat, he threw the gun down.

Larry Donovan's eyes were narrow.

"That settles it, Hamlin," he said tensely; "this is a pretty big country up here, but it ain't big enough for both of us. One of us is going to have blood on our hands if the other stays. Either you or I have got to get out, and the question is—which one of us is going to get?"

"Who are you to lay down the law like this?" flared Clara. "We were letting you alone, weren't we? All right, you let *us* alone and there'll be no trouble. I'll promise that."

Larry Donovan shook his head.

"This country isn't big enough for your brother and me," he repeated.

"And I suppose," cried the girl, "that you are ordering us to leave. Well, we won't go; I tell you now that we won't go."

Donovan remained grimly inexorable.

"One of us has got to go," he insisted, "or there'll be a killing. The only question is—which of us goes and which of us stays."

Silence. Larry stepped forward, picked up the gun, broke the cylinder, and replaced the cartridges.

"We'll settle it here, and we'll settle it now," he added. "We'll let the cards decide, Hamlin. One hand of poker, my claim against yours—and the loser makes tracks. That's fair enough, isn't it?"

"And you dealing the cards, I suppose?" sneered Paul Hamlin.

Larry Donovan shrugged. "I'm even willing that you deal the cards," he answered.

"We'll not do it!" cried Clara. "We'll not gamble away our chance like that!"

"It's a bargain!" shouted Hamlin. "One hand, your claim against mine—and the loser pulls stakes. And the grub supplies go with the claim."

"That's the proposition," affirmed Larry. "I reckon we'll have to go to my shack and get a deck of cards."

"Not much!" growled Hamlin. "We'll play with my cards or we'll not play at all—and I do the dealing."

"Suits me," nodded Larry, and swung about, starting up the bank of the creek. Clara caught her brother's arm.

"You shan't do it, Paul!" she said in a tense whisper. "If you lose——"

"If I lose," he broke in, his own voice dropped to an undertone, "I haven't lost anything. Twenty ounces of gold for a whole summer's work, bah!" His breath whistled excitedly between his teeth. "And I'm pretty sure Donovan's struck good pay dirt."

"How could you know that, Paul?"

"I've got a hunch," he evaded, not explaining that he had himself been a trespasser and had found rich deposit in Donovan's sluice box.

"Besides," he added, "our food is running short; we need Donovan's grub supply. This is our chance—the only real chance we've got, and I'd have thrown up the sponge two weeks ago if I'd had my way about it."

Clara still did not like the proposition, but she knew how useless it was to argue against her brother's stubbornness.

The three entered the Hamlin cabin and Paul got a soiled, tattered deck of cards from the shelf, worn frayed with many long hours at solitaire. Paul was plainly excited and eager, Clara nervous, and Larry Donovan calm except for a certain tightness of expression about the eyes.

"Go ahead and deal 'em, Hamlin," he said crisply.

But Paul was not ready to deal. His fingers shaking noticeably, he shuffled and reshuffled the pasteboards. Once they tumbled out of his hands and scattered over the table.

"Seems like your a little unsteady," drawled Larry. "Must be you got a pretty rich claim you're about to part with."

Paul Hamlin drew a deep breath and began to deal the cards, the first one to Donovan, the second to himself, and so in rotation. Each man picked up his hand, Donovan carelessly as though it were a game of penny ante, the other avidly as though he had staked his very life. Clara stood on tiptoe and peered over her brother's shoulder.

"Don't do that!" snapped Paul. "It's bad luck!"

The girl had seen a pair of red nines. She could feel Paul's body quivering. Staring across at the back of Donovan's cards she saw that one had a torn corner, and she knew that card. It was an ace. If Donovan had two aces, she and Paul were beaten.

"What you got, Hamlin? Can you beat a heart flush?"

A curse ripped from Paul's throat as he flung down his cards, face up.

"Show me that heart flush!" he cried.

Donovan dallied; after a moment of suspense he folded his own cards together and smiled faintly.

"Seems like a pair of nines is going to be good, Hamlin. I didn't say I had a heart flush. I just asked you if you could beat it. You win, Hamlin. Get out the pen and paper and I reckon we'd better attend to the little formality of signing over my claim to you."

Still smiling, he slipped his losing hand into the middle of the deck.

"That was a lucky pair of nines, Hamlin," he added; "I struck some rich-looking color day before yesterday."

CHAPTER VIII.

ACE HIGH.

THE bill of sale had been signed, and Larry Donovan had gone—evidently to his own cabin for the purpose of gathering up his personal belongings. Clara and Paul stood, staring at each other, the latter grinning exultantly.

"Lucky Larry Donovan, eh?" he crowed. "He's not so lucky, you noticed, when some one else is dealing the cards. He got caught in his own trap—thought I was going to be stupid enough to play with *his* deck!" He laughed uproariously.

"He took it like a dead-game sport, I'll say that for him," murmured the girl. "I wonder what he *did* have in his hand."

She reached across the table and picked up the deck of cards, running through them until she came to the one with the torn corner, and as she had known it would be, it was the ace of clubs. Curiously she turned the next one, and her eyes went very wide, for what she saw was the ace of diamonds. Then the third card—the ace of spades. The next two—a pair of kings!

"Paul!" she whispered weakly. "Paul look at this! He—he threw away—aces full!"

"You're crazy!" scoffed Paul. "Why would he throw away—— Oh, don't be such a fool!"

"I tell you he did!" Clara cried excitedly. "I noticed the torn card in his hand, and I knew he had one ace anyhow, and he—he slipped them into the middle of the deck. That—that was to hide his hand. The next four cards following the torn ace *have* to be the cards he held, you see."

"And I tell you that you're crazy!" Paul Hamlin shouted angrily. "Why, the man's got gold on his claim—gold! There must have been almost a thousand dollars' worth of dust in his sluice box the night I——"

Clara Hamlin lifted her head and stared at her brother intently for a moment.

"And yet," she said, very slowly, "you ordered him off our claim this very afternoon. At least he did not sneak——"

"That's not the point!" snapped her brother. "You're trying to make it appear that he deliberately gave us his claim, that he is some kind of a self-sacrificing hero! Of all the nonsense! One minute he knocks me down and the next—— Oh, what a duffer I've got for a sister!"

But Clara Hamlin was no duffer. A great many things now became clear to her. She knew now why Larry Donovan had kissed her as he gathered her in his arms. She knew that Paul was mistaken about Larry Donovan's being a card sharp. She knew, more than that, that the whole quarrel had been a carefully planned procedure, that Larry had deliberately provoked the unpleasantness with a preconceived idea of working things around to this very climax. He had known that Paul's claim was worthless, and he must have known, too, that their necessity for making a strike was very great.

Her face flushed, her eyes very bright, Clara explained all this to her brother.

"Oh, it's all so obvious—now!" she gasped. "It was so deliberate—the way he infuriated us. And there's his hand—aces full, to speak for itself."

"But I tell you it's absurd!" bellowed Paul Hamlin. "Why should the man do such a mad thing?"

"Can't you guess, Paul?"

The dawn of a complete understanding finally penetrated Paul Hamlin's stubbornness.

"Good lord, sis, I hadn't thought of that! He did it—because he's in love—with you!"

"A man like that, Paul, doesn't cheat at cards," Clara said gently.

To Paul Hamlin's credit, he was very much ashamed.

"The truth of it is, sis," he muttered, "I was about three sheets in the wind that night at the trading post, and it seemed so uncanny—a man filling four kings on a four-card draw—and he was dealing, you see——" He swallowed a lump in his throat. "And I guess he

didn't really want to fight; I—well, I'm dashed sorry, that's all I can say."

Clara Hamlin had leaped to her feet.

"You'd better say it to him, don't you think?" she suggested. "We—I think we'll go together."

Larry Donovan was loading his canoe with just enough supplies to get him into the trading post, which would be his destination. In another five minutes he would have pushed off and gone swiftly downstream. He heard a shout —two shouts, in fact, that mingled as one—and he knew as he saw Clara and her brother running toward him, that the approach was friendly, that some sort of a miracle had happened, and that he was still Lucky Larry Donovan.

BIRDS OF THE WEST AND NORTH AMERICA

The Black-headed Grosbeak

(Zamelodia Melanocephala)

OF the three principal grosbeaks, the black-headed species is the only true Western bird. The cardinal grosbeak is an inhabitant of the Southern States, while the rose-breasted grosbeak belongs to the Eastern States. From Nebraska to California and from British Columbia south to Mexico, the charming little black-headed bird wings his way and raises his family.

The nest of this grosbeak is loosely constructed of twigs, lined with fine roots. Among the dogwoods, vine maples, and alders of the Pacific slope the nests may be found, but in southern California they are built in chaparral or willow trees. The eggs, which are usually three or four in number, are of a pale-blue shade, spotted rather thickly with brown.

The diet of these birds consists to some extent of fruit—figs, cherries, and berries; but the greater part of their fare is made up of various insects which do more harm toward the fruit trees than the birds. The codling moth, canker worm, flower beetles, and scale insects are numbered among the grosbeaks' chosen food.

Usually, birds of all kinds are quietest when on their nest, so that there will be no chance of detection; but the black-headed grosbeak has been known to carol joyfully while brooding, and to become quite unafraid of human beings who want to watch it.

The grosbeak parents have a most unusual way of sharing the work of raising a family. One day the father is seen feeding worms and insects to the baby birds every ten or fifteen minutes, while the mother arrives only once an hour with food. The next day the mother appears to be carrying on the strenuous labors, while the father is flitting about in the sunlight preening his bright plumage. Thus, the parents seem to divide the work of the household and neither is left to shoulder all the responsibility.

The male and female differ somewhat in coloring. The male bird has a black head, and a red-brown breast, which tapers to lemon-yellow. The wings and tail, which are the same color as the head feathers, are distinctively marked with two bars of white. His mate is sedately clad in a brown-and-buff dress, which in its way is quite as attractive as that of the male. Her head is barred with white, which seems to add an alert expression to her make-up. The beak of both birds is particularly thick, suitable for breaking up seed pods, and one wonders how they feed their young so easily. A camera view shows that they put the bill down the little one's open mouth and drop the food in.

The Stranger

By Max Brand

Synopsis of Preceding Chapters.

LEWIS SHERRY, cow-puncher, agrees to protect Oliver Wilton for ten days. Wilton seems to live in terror, especially of sailors, but most of all of his niece, Beatrice, who is to inherit half a million when she marries.

Pete Lang, his partner, reluctantly joins Sherry's enterprise. Doctor Eustace Layman appears and reports on a worthless old sailor, Fennel, who boasts of his acquaintance with Wilton. Sherry learns that Wilton was in charge of the *Princess Marie*, which foundered in a typhoon, a loss so detrimental to the Wilton fortunes that Everett Wilton, the owner, committed suicide. Beatrice practices shooting with a silenced revolver.

Guarded by Pete and Lew, Wilton goes to meet Fennel by appointment in the garden. Lew hears a rustling sound in the brush and pounces on Beatrice, white-faced, a gun warm in her hand. She only says she "did not do it." Lew takes her to rejoin Pete and finds him bent over Wilton, who is lying on the path shot through the head.

CHAPTER XV.

SHERIFF MOON.

AS Beatrice Wilton, half fainting, leaned against Sherry, he lowered her to the ground. Pete Lang stood over her.

"Miss Wilton," he said, "d'you know anything about this?"

"No! I only know that I—I stumbled over the body!"

"Did you see the sailor? Fennel, I mean?"

"No!"

"Did you stop here?"

"Here? By Uncle——"

"Yes. Did you stop here?"

"No, no!"

"You went straight on past him?"

"Yes, yes!"

"You'd better go back to the house," said Lang.

"I'll go," she agreed.

She looked up to Sherry with the same appeal in her eyes that he had seen there before; then she moved away. But still, at a little distance, she turned again, and flashed back to Sherry a wild glance of appeal.

Sherry remained, staring at his friend, and Lang stared back at him.

"What became of Fennel?" he asked. "He must have done this!"

"Fennel? I dunno!" muttered Lang. "Look here, kid. Is there apt to be two .22-caliber, high-power revolvers in the same town at the same time—both of 'em with silencers on their guns?"

"She couldn't have done it," protested Sherry, though he knew that his voice was weak with the lack of conviction. "She simply could not have done it! You know that, Pete. Tell me you realize that!"

Pete Lang grunted savagely.

"She lied straight off the bat," he pointed out. "How could you want me to talk soft about her, eh? She lied like a streak. She didn't stop near the dead man. You heard that?"

"Well, and what about it?" asked Sherry.

"Well, man! Didn't you see the blood on her hand?"

"Brush is full of thorns," said Sherry desperately. "You take a young girl like that—let her see a dead man—and what will she do? Bolt, of course! No looking where she's going! And the result will be blood on her hand, if she scratched it on a thorn. You see that, Pete? Of course you see that there's a lot of sense in that?"

Pete Lang looked upon his friend with an air of pity.

"I'm kinda sorry for you, 'Tiny,'" he said. "That's all that I got to say to you. I'm just kinda sorry for you. Now, we'll leave things be. The sheriff will want to see this, without too much of the scene changed. You scatter down to town and let the sheriff know about it. And then head straight on for the hotel and take another look at Fennel's room. It ain't going to be hard when they know that he's suspected of murder!"

Sherry was very glad indeed to have something active to do. He made no protest against the manner in which his friend had taken the lead in this affair, but like a good lieutenant, he marched unquestioningly to obey orders.

He got his horse at the stable behind the house and went down the steep road to the street in one furious plunge, with a rattle of flying gravel before him and a rolling of loosened stones behind.

It was easy to find the sheriff. He sat like a little wooden image in front of the hotel, staring unwinking before him and occasionally smoothing his fine white beard. Sheriff Herbert Moon never drank and never smoked. He had no nervous need of occupying his hands with trifles and his brain with a cloud of smoke. He ate little. He talked less. And he held down his office of sheriff not by dint of popular speeches or appeals to friendly voters, but by sheer brilliance in his office, wherein his record was flawless and unequaled during these past twenty-five years. Exactly half of his life he had spent in catching criminals of all kinds. The work had made him look at least fifteen years older than his actual age. But still he stuck to his task. Nothing changed. He hated change, men said, and that was why he remained in Clayrock, living in the same little shed which had served him as a youth, twenty-five years before, and propping it here and there, from year to year, as its knees grew weaker, and its pathetic back threatened to break. He never had married. He never had so much as looked at a woman. He had no friends. He lived, in fact, incased in solitude, like a sword in a battered but strong sheath. But when there was use for the weapon —lo, the pure, bright flash of the steel when it was drawn!

So with Sheriff Herbert Moon, who sat at rest, all passive, resting in body, in mind, and in soul, until the summons came which brought him out upon the man trail!

In twenty-five years, he had killed or captured two hundred and twelve criminals single-handed.

In that list there was no account taken of the sweepings of drunkards from

gutters in the early days of the mining boom. But two hundred and twelve times he faced danger for the sake of upholding the law, and he had nearly always won.

It was said that for every year of his service in Clayrock, Sheriff Moon carried a scar. Some silver dot or streak upon his body for every one of twenty-five years of labor! But his face was unmarked. Only, below the chin, there was a long, puckering slash. He was ashamed of it. He always muffled his neck with some scarf, so that he was given rather an old-fashioned appearance by this peculiarity of his dress; and indeed, it was merely to harmonize with that necessary neck-mask that he had allowed his beard to grow, and had trimmed it slender and narrow. If his neck apparel was old-fashioned, so should all his appearance be.

Time, from the moment that he made those two alterations in his appearance, made but a gradual change in the sheriff. Only, each year his attire seemed more threadbare. Men declared, mockingly, that he never had bought a new suit of clothes for twenty-five years. Some men vowed that he was a miser, and that he must have a fortune stowed away in some corner. However, not a soul was aware that the salary of the sheriff had stood still for a quarter of a century. No one thought of increasing it. The buying power of the dollar dropped to thirty per cent. But the sheriff asked for no raise of pay and none was given him. Of the rewards which he earned by his courage he took no account, but always gave the money, as it came in, to charity.

"A man cannot live on blood money, you know," said the sheriff.

To this little man—"He's so small, that's why he don't get shot up bad," said the tough citizens of Clayrock—to this little sheriff, on the veranda of the hotel, appeared big Lew Sherry. He leaped from his horse. A billow of thin dust swept before him as he halted in front of Herbert Moon.

"You're Moon? You're the sheriff?"

"That's my name, sir," said the sheriff.

"Wilton's been murdered in his garden. I came along to report. He was shot through the brain. The body's lying where it fell. Pete Lang is waiting to show you everything."

The sheriff stared, for an instant, his lips parted. Against the white of the beard, those lips seemed young and smooth and strangely red.

"Dear me, dear me!" said the sheriff. "Wilton is dead! Another rich Wilton, and in a single year. Dear me, dear me!"

He did not rise at once. He continued to look at Sherry as though the big man had told him the most remarkable thing in the world.

"I'm going to tell you one thing more. The man that did the shooting was Fennel—the drunken sailor that lived here in the hotel and talked so much and drank such a lot more," said Sherry.

"I'm glad to know that," nodded the sheriff. "Of course I want to know who did the murdering. Thank you, Mr. Sherry."

"You know me?"

"Of course. Since the day you killed Capper. I've known you ever since that day. I have to know people who can shoot so straight," said the gentle voice of Herbert Moon.

It made Sherry feel a little uneasy. We like to read the character of a new event in its face. We don't wish to go by opposites. This fellow appeared to Sherry like the most inoffensive of men. He looked like a learned man, tired of study, retiring from his labors.

But he was a famous warrior. He was not one who had killed a great many. After his first month in office, he had not had to. Men usually surrendered when this terrible and quiet little man came upon their traces. But

he almost frightened Sherry with his gentleness.

"Are you going back with me?" asked the sheriff.

"No. I'm going to stay here, just now."

It occurred to Sherry that he had better not announce his intention of searching the room of Fennel. That might interfere with the sheriff's ideas of what was best. And most desperately did Sherry want to conduct that search in person, in the hope that, in some fashion, he could be able to fasten upon the sailor the crime of that day.

For there was ever, in the back of his brain, the image of Beatrice Wilton, with the blood upon her hand.

In his own pocket was her gun, the silencer attached, the empty cartridge! He felt that that was her destiny; and he carried it; he would guard it!

He went into the hotel and said bluntly that he wanted the key to Fennel's room. The clerk, impressed by this sternness, handed it over without mark, merely staring, and Sherry went up to the chamber.

It was almost exactly as it had been when he last saw it. But there were four whisky bottles upon the table instead of two. Three of them were empty. But the fourth was still untouched.

Suddenly, Sherry struck his knuckles against his forehead. He turned. The clerk was in the doorway, a little frightened, but very curious.

"Has any one been in this room drinking with Fennel?" Sherry asked.

"Nobody," said the clerk.

Sherry stared at the whisky bottles again. It was most odd. According to the mute testimony of those bottles, Fennel had consumed more than a quart of whisky in his room since Sherry last examined the place. But that was not possible. What, then, had become of the liquor?

A small matter, no doubt, but when there is murder in the air, small matters loom large.

CHAPTER XVI.

WHO DID IT?

"IS there anything wrong?" asked the clerk.

"Murder, that's all," said Sherry gloomily.

He enjoyed, mildly, the confusion and the astonishment of the other.

"I knew that no good ever would come out of a rat like that. I never seen such a fellow for absorbin' whisky. A couple of quarts a day, sometimes. I never seen anything like it! He was a regular sponge," declared the clerk.

A sponge, indeed, if two quarts of whisky could be consumed in a single day!

He brooded upon the problem and upon the room, and as though to get more light on the subject, he opened the window nearest to the table.

"You take a man with a brain full of alcohol, that way, he'd be sure to do pretty nearly anything. Crazy with drink, day and night. Sometimes you could hear him laughin' and singin' in his choked way here in the room in the middle of the night!"

Sherry listened with only half his mind. The other half was fumbling vaguely, as a man will do at a problem in geometry, when all the lines and the angles go wrong for him. And in that state, he stared even at the drainage pipe that ran down the wall and noted with dim unconcern that a spot on it was of different color from the rest, fresher, as though it had rusted less. He touched that spot, and it gave on hinges to his finger. It was, in fact, a trapdoor let into the pipe. It brought Sherry quickly out of his haze. What was that used for?

He stared more closely. He could see that the edges of the metal had been cut not long ago. It would not have

been a difficult task, for the pipe was lead.

Then a thought came to Sherry, and he hurried out of the room and down to the garden to a point just below the window of Fennel's room. The clerk was leaning out the window.

"Find anything, Sherry?" he called, with eagerness.

Tiny Lew stood still, his eyes half closed, his breath drawing deeply. But there was no mistaking the odor which welled up thick and rank from the ground all about the vent of the drainage pipe. Close about it, the grass was brown and dead. It had been soaked with alcohol poured down the pipe. And that was the meaning of the trapdoor in the drain! That was the explanation, too, of the Herculean drinking of this sham drunkard.

"Find anything?" exclaimed the clerk again.

"Not a thing," said Sherry, and went straightway to his horse and cantered away for the Wilton place.

He had a strangely powerful impulse to turn the head of the horse on the out trail and leave Clayrock and its evil crime behind him forever. Curiously enough, it was not the thought of Beatrice Wilton that stopped him now, but the knowledge that Peter Lang was yonder in the garden of the house, using his wits to solve this mystery.

So Sherry held on his way to the Wilton house, and walked his horse up the steep carriage road to the stable. The Chinese cook, came out from the kitchen with a tin of scraps in his hand, stared at Sherry with fear and wonder, as at a dangerous being from a strange world. Tiny Lew went around to the front of the house and there he found the sheriff, Lang, and Doctor Layman all gathered in a close group discussing some clothes which lay on the ground before them.

Lang had discovered them among the trees, by closely following up the trail of Fennel, where it left the spot where Wilton had fallen. They consisted of the overcoat, the old hat, and the clumsy boots of Fennel, which he had worn when he confronted the three a little earlier on this tragic day.

"Murderers run, of course, after they've done the killing," said the doctor. "I suppose there isn't any doubt that Fennel is the man who did this thing?"

"It looks that way, of course," said the sheriff.

"Thank goodness, he can't go far!" said Layman. "Not with his build and his face! He'd made himself well enough known around Clayrock, and in a few hours you'll have him, sheriff!"

Here Lang put in: "There's somebody else to be considered in this job!"

Sherry glared at him. And when he failed to catch the eye of his friend he said roughly: "What d'you mean by that, Pete?"

Pete Lang waved off the question.

"I'll talk to the sheriff," he persisted. "Murder's a black thing, and if there's any way of getting to the truth about it, I want to help."

"Aye," said Herbert Moon in his soft voice, "murder is black! But in this part of the world there are too many who don't agree with your viewpoint, I'm afraid. Murder is black! And there's always night gathered around it. Can you help us out of the dark, Mr. Lang?"

"I can," said Pete Lang. "I want to tell you what I've seen Miss Wilton do."

"Pete!" cried Sherry in agony.

"Man! Man!" protested the doctor. "Beatrice? Beatrice Wilton? What are you talking about?"

"I think you know your duty, Lang," was all the sheriff remarked.

"I know my duty. I'm gunna do it. I got a clear case. I'm gunna state it! Me and old Tiny, yonder, seen this here girl practicing off in the woods with a small-caliber revolver with a

silencer on it, so that you didn't hear any explosion. You just heard a sort of puff. Well, a while back Tiny ran into her in the woods sitting pretty thoughtful, and that gun in her lap. And now I want to point out that Wilton was killed with a bullet out of just such a gun, and that him and me, follering close on behind, didn't hear any sound of a gun!"

"It was the wind!" exclaimed Sherry eagerly. "The wind was howling and roaring through the trees, just then. There was enough wind to kill the sound."

"The sound of a revolver—not more'n forty yards away!" persisted Lang.

Sherry groaned. He saw the absurdity of such a claim as he had just made.

The doctor and the sheriff said nothing. They watched and listened intensely, their eyes never stirring from the face of Lang, who continued: "It ain't easy to say these things. I gotta explain that I hate sneaking murder. And a woman that shoots to kill is a lot more sneaking than a man, because she's got a lot more chances of getting off, if she's caught. Well, this one is caught, and I hope she hangs for it—and the prettier her face, the more I hope that she hangs! After we started hunting for Wilton—missing him on the path—we heard a sound in the woods. I asked Tiny Lew to go after it. He did, and he found this here girl crouching in a bush. There was a gun in her hand.

"The barrel of that gun was still warm. There was an empty shell in the cylinder. The girl was scared to death. The first thing she said was: 'I didn't do it!' Sherry had to carry her back to the place of the killing. She pretty near fainted. And—there was blood on her hand!"

So, rapidly, heaping up the important facts, one on another, Pete Lang made out the case against the girl.

The sheriff joined his small hands together and, raising his head, looked up at the dark flight of the clouds across the sky.

Then Doctor Layman exclaimed bitterly: "Moon, you're not going to take this thing seriously? You don't mean to say that you'll register all this against Beatrice Wilton?"

The sheriff did not answer.

"Great Scott, man!" cried Layman, "Don't you know Beatrice Wilton? A lady if ever one——"

"A Wilton," said the sheriff. "I know that she's a Wilton. And they have a strange sort of a record, Doctor Layman."

"Whose voice have you against her?" asked the doctor, who seemed in an odd state of fear and excitement. "That man's! An unknown cow-puncher! A gun fighter—proved by the fact that Wilton hired him for that purpose. He testifies against Beatrice Wilton! Sheriff, may he not have some reason for wanting to put the blame on other shoulders? Doesn't it stand to reason that unless he had some such purpose, he never would have accused her? A Western man doesn't go out of his way, as he has done, to accuse a woman against whom he could not possibly have any grudge?"

The sheriff looked mildly upon the doctor and appeared to be considering this statement, while Lang raised a finger and pointed it like a gun at the speaker.

"You're talking a lot and you're talking loud!" he cautioned.

"Do you think that I care a whit for your threats?" demanded the doctor, actually taking a step nearer to Lang. "I despise you and all the rest of your gun-fighting crew! Sheriff, I want you to tell me right now that you're going to discount the testimony of this ruffian!"

The sheriff merely said: "Mr. Sherry was with Lang. You were with him at

the time the shooting must have taken place, Sherry?"

"I was," said Sherry gloomily.

"Have you any reason to suspect that Lang is twisting the truth?" persisted the sheriff.

Sherry stared at the face of his friend.

"It's all right, Lew," said Lang gently. "You don't have to stick by me in this. I know just how you feel!"

Sherry groaned aloud.

"I can't turn a lie against Pete," he confessed. "Lord forgive me—but I got to say that everything he's said is correct. He hasn't exaggerated a single thing."

"I'm sorry to hear it," said the sheriff. "It makes it necessary for me to see Miss Wilton. Will you tell me where she is?"

The doctor threw up both hands to the sky, and letting them fall again, he struck one against his forehead heavily.

"She's in that room to the right. The one with the French door opening on the garden."

"Will you come with me?" asked the sheriff of Tiny Lew.

The big man followed little Herbert Moon to the indicated door. They tapped.

"Who's there?" called the uncertain voice of the girl.

"Sheriff Moon," said the man of the law.

There was a frightened gasp inside.

And Sherry, interpreting that stifled cry with blinding suddenness, gave his shoulder to the door and burst it open, with a shivering and crashing of broken glass. He, lurching into the chamber, saw Beatrice Wilton running to the center table. Her hand had scooped up the revolver which lay there and raised it toward her own head when the reaching hand of Sherry struck at her.

The weight of the blow flung her against the wall; and the gun exploded with its ominous, soft noise and thudded a bullet into the ceiling, while Sherry, leaping on, gathered the girl safely into his arms.

CHAPTER XVII.

BEATRICE'S STORY.

FOLLOWING swiftly on the choked noise of the shot, Lang and the doctor would have rushed into the room, but the sheriff turned toward them and waved them away.

"It's my duty to examine Miss Wilton," he said. "Mr. Sherry is already here. He'll serve me as a witness. If you gentlemen wish to assist me, you may search the grounds again. Doctor Layman, perhaps you'll inform the coroner?"

With that, he closed the broken door in their faces and turned back to the room.

Beatrice Wilton had sunk into a chair. Leaning to one side, supporting herself with one stiffened arm, while her head hung low, she looked about to faint. Sherry stood behind her, his arms folded. He needed that stricture of his big, hard, arm muscles across his breast; otherwise, he felt as though his heart would tear its way out of his breast.

The sheriff took a chair by the center table. He waved to Sherry to take another, but Sherry shook his head.

"Miss Wilton," said the sheriff, "you are under arrest for the death of Oliver Wilton. Whatever you say now may be used against you in a court of law as admissible testimony. Nothing will be forced from you. You are fully warned about the danger of talking?"

She swayed a little. So much so, that Sherry put down a hand as if prepared to steady her. But then she straightened herself and looked slowly around the room, as though she wished to gain strength and courage from familiar sights. Sherry, with an aching heart, followed that glance. It was a dainty place, thoroughly feminine.

There was an Italian bed, low, with a gilt back; and before the bed a painted screen which almost obscured it, so that the chamber could serve as a living room. All was bright and cheerful, gay little landscapes on the wall, and three rugs blurring the floor with color. But the broken door seemed to Sherry to have a strange meaning; so had the security of this girl been lost, and the danger of the world been let in upon her!

Now she looked back at the sheriff and nodded slowly.

"I understand," said she.

Her voice was steady, and the heart of Sherry leaped again—with admiration, this time. And he told himself, bitterly, that he cared little what she had done. She was beautiful, and she was brave. That, in itself, was enough for him.

"You know that I don't want to take advantage of you?" went on Herbert Moon. "For that matter, your friend Sherry wouldn't let me, I suppose!"

She looked hastily over her shoulder at the towering form and the frowning brow of Tiny Lew.

"You didn't know he is your friend?" went on Moon.

And she, still glancing up, smiled faintly at Sherry—an incredulous smile, he thought.

"What I want you to do," said the sheriff, "is to talk freely. Times like this unlock the heart. They break down the barrier which we ordinarily erect against the eye and the ear of the world. Well, the more freely you talk now, the easier it will be to establish your innocence. We have certain facts against you. I'm not allowed to tell you what they are. I even should not tell you that a statement by a suspected person immediately after arrest usually bears with double force in the eyes of the law. In this time of excitement and confusion, truth is supposed to be nearer to the tongue of the one under arrest. You have something to say, of course. Will you say it to me now?"

Sherry broke in: "Why should she talk now? This is a case where she ought to have a lawyer. If I were she, I wouldn't say a word to anybody without the advice of a lawyer, and a good one!"

"That is usually a good rule," said the sheriff. "I'm sorry to say that a great many officers of the law are only interested in securing convictions. But I have grown old in my work, Mr. Sherry, and I hope you'll believe me when I say that I have only one great wish in every case—and that is to secure justice, not prison stripes, for the accused. Now, Miss Wilton, will you talk to me?"

Sherry suddenly left his post back of her chair and stood beside the sheriff, facing her. At that, her eyes no longer wandered. She spoke to the sheriff, but her eyes, all the while, were fixed upon the handsome, stern face of Sherry. And sometimes she looked down to his big hands, sun-blackened; and sometimes her glance swept across the great breadth of his shoulders—famous shoulders were they, up and down the length of the range.

She said:

"I was walking in the woods. I was disturbed——" She paused.

"I was afraid," she murmured.

"You were afraid," said the sheriff, encouraging her gently. "Will you tell me of what you were afraid?"

She moistened her lips, tried to speak, hesitated. And then, looking earnestly upon Sherry, as though she were drawing strength and inspiration from him, she continued: "I was afraid of my uncle."

Sherry raised a warning hand.

"I wouldn't interrupt her!" exclaimed Herbert Moon, with some asperity.

"Don't you see," broke in Sherry, "that if you admit you were afraid of your uncle, you furnish with your own

testimony a reason why you might have wished to——"

"To kill him?"

She spoke straight out, her voice perfectly steady. "I understand that, of course. I'm trying to tell the truth!"

"You were afraid of your uncle," said the sheriff. "You said that, as my friend here interrupted. Sherry, I'm afraid that I'll have to complete this interview without you. Will you step outside?"

Beatrice Wilton stiffened suddenly in the chair.

"No!" she exclaimed. "Please let him stay. He helps me—he really helps me to tell the truth!"

"Then—by all means," said the sheriff, as gentle as ever. "Let us continue this conversation, like three friends. And will you remember, my dear young girl, that it is always best to tell the whole truth—usually even to win in the law, and always, I trust, for the sake of the God who hears us all!"

Now there was not a great deal of religion on the cow range, and the stern men of the law were hardly apt to have sacred names upon their lips any more than the reckless cow-punchers and gunmen whom they tried to keep in order. Therefore, Sherry heard this speech with a little shock of surprise and of awe. And the girl looked for a moment from him and toward Herbert Moon. But instantly her glance came back to the big man.

"You were afraid of your uncle," went on the sheriff. "And why were you afraid of him?"

"My father's money was left in trust for one year. At the end of that time, it passes into the hands of my guardian. Uncle Oliver is my guardian. In a few more days, my money would all have been placed in his hands. But still I would have a claim on it. Now, suppose I died. Uncle Oliver would be the next heir. You understand?"

The sheriff nodded.

"Your uncle would have been the next heir. And you thought that he was capable of—taking your life for the sake of that money?"

"I didn't know. But I was afraid!"

"What gave you such an idea?"

"There were a good many things. He had queer ways. He lived in the house like a general in a fort. He was always practicing with weapons in the woods behind the house. Besides, I once overheard——"

She paused.

However, the sheriff did not offer to encourage her, and it was Sherry who nodded slightly.

Then she went on, speaking directly to him: "It has been a rather lonely house to live in—since my father's death. I don't know why. It used to seem very cheerful, before. It was like living at the top of a wave. One could look down all over the town, and the plain, and the hills and the mountains beyond. But afterward, it seemed cold and dark. I was always lonely. I used to hate the house and spend a good deal of my time in the garden or walking among the trees. And one day I was out very late. I should have been home before. It was really after sunset. Yes, I remember that I could see patches of red sky in the west, between the tree trunks. I was coming in slowly, even late as it was, because I hated to reach the house, and because I went slowly, I suppose I made little noise. Then I came on the sound of voices. I heard my uncle talking excitedly."

"And who was the other man?" asked the sheriff.

"I don't know. He spoke more softly. I hardly made out a word he said. It sounded a little like the voice of Doctor Layman, however."

"Will you go on then?"

"I heard my uncle cry out: 'I tell you that I haven't them. I've lost them. I haven't a single one!' Then he swore, like a man frantic with excitement, and

he went on: 'Do you suppose that if I were able to find them, and have them, I'd waste my perfectly good time here trying to——'"

"How did he finish that sentence?"

"He didn't finish it. But then he said: 'Heaven forgive me! Heaven forgive me! People think I'm an honorable man. If they knew what I had in mind and heart—and then you come here to badger me! But I swear that I haven't one of them. Would I be staying here if I did have them?'

"After that I clearly heard the other man say: 'That's your responsibility. You have had them. They were in your charge. You ought to know that you'll have to make good for them. You ought to be able to lay your hands on enough money to make a part payment. That's not asking a great deal!'

"My uncle answered, excited as ever, but a wind began to rise, and I couldn't hear any more. I went on back to the house. And ever since that moment, I've been sick with fear of him. I've never known when I'd die in my sleep. I've feared even the food on the table before me!"

"Very well. And then to-day?"

"I used to go out with a revolver, practicing. I thought that I should learn to take care of myself, you see. To-day, I was in the garden, doing that. I'd filled my revolver and fired one shot —at a sapling."

"Did you hit it?"

She blinked.

"No—I think not. I walked on through the trees and came out onto a path—and saw a man lying face down! I leaned over him. I saw it was Uncle Oliver. I touched his face to try to rouse him. My hand came away sticky with blood! Then I went mad with fear and ran off into the brush; and you found me there—and brought me back!"

She smiled, a twisted smile, at Sherry; and then closed her eyes and turned white.

CHAPTER XVIII.

SHERRY TRIES HIS HAND.

AT this moment it appeared to Sherry that the poor girl had proved her case completely, and he stepped a little forward so that he could turn and look more fully into the face of the sheriff, for he wanted to see the conviction appear in the eyes of that man of the law. But he only saw the sheriff lean forward with a peculiar keenness of expression, and instead of using gentle words, or none, when the girl was so overwhelmed, Sheriff Moon said quickly: "Of course, it isn't a pleasant thing to see a dead man. It's not pleasant a bit. That unnerved you. That sent you off scampering through the brush. I suppose that your brain spun and turned dark, didn't it? Poor girl!"

"Yes, yes!" she muttered, without opening her eyes.

Comforting enough the words of the sheriff had been, except that they had called up the grisly picture of the dead too vividly, but in sound and manner they were not so kind—they had come out rapidly, with a sort of savage eagerness, which Sherry was at a loss to account for.

He said to himself: There's poison in that little man. There's poison in all little men! For often it seemed to him that the smaller the man, the more waspish the temper. For his own part, anger advanced upon him slowly. He could endure many taunts and many insults, but only by degrees passion inflamed his brain, until at last he could not endure, and had to fight. So he felt now that the sheriff had allowed bitterness to master him and had struck at a helpless girl.

Her eyes opened again, and she was looking at him, her eyes very wide, but little seeing in them.

The sheriff stood up.

"I won't bother you any longer," he said. "You've made your statement as

complete as you care to have it, I suppose?"

"I don't think of anything else," said she.

"I'm going outside," said the sheriff. "But Mr. Sherry will stay in here with you, in case you want anything, or if you feel faint. Mr. Sherry will take care of you!"

He went out with a brisk step, and all at once she roused herself out of her trance and sprang up and ran to Tiny Lew. She looked very small. She did not come up to his shoulder, and she caught with her hands at his arms, hard and stiff as the large steel cables which made a ship's crew, stowing them below in ample circles, curse.

"He doesn't believe in me." said Beatrice Wilton.

"He's a fool if he doesn't!" exclaimed Sherry from his heart. "But he didn't say that he didn't believe. You take these fellows of the law and they're great on not committing themselves."

"He doesn't believe in me!" she repeated, shaking her head, as though she were casting off the importance of Sherry's faint denial. "Tell me! He doesn't believe what I said?"

"They're queer—all these man hunters!" he told her. "It don't matter what he thinks, though. He's not the judge. And he's a long way from being twelve men on the jury."

At this, the strength of her frenzy of fear relaxed a good deal; she was faint, rather than frantic, once more; and she dropped into a chair by the table, locked her hands together, and stared at him over them.

Sherry was fascinated, for it had been many years since he had lived in the land where women's hands are white and slender and soft. He almost had forgotten that there are hands which have not been thickened, and spread, and blunted by pulling at the reins, or by swinging axes; hands not reddened from work in dish water, or in washing suds on Mondays; hands not roughened from scrubbing with sand soap, from dragging heavy brooms across splintered floors.

But she was out of the other world, delicately and softly made, and so Sherry stared at those two hands which gripped and fought at one another until they trembled. The wrists were like the hands. No bulging cords stared from them. He could have held them both easily in the grip of one hand; but the more he felt the excess of his power over her the more he was subdued by two intense emotions—a vast pity for her, vast awe because of the delicate cunning with which nature had made her.

When she spoke again, her voice had changed. She was hoarse, as though she had been screaming into a wind, or sobbing heavily for a long time.

"Do you think he'll bring me up for trial? Do you think that, Mr. Sherry?"

"That's not for him to say," he told her. "That's for the coroner's jury to say."

She held out both her hands to him, palms up; her eyes were half closed and he had a shuddering fear that she was about to weep.

"Don't you understand?" she asked. "Everybody in this place does just as Sheriff Moon wants. He does the thinking for all Clayrock. They would think nothing of accusing me, if he so much as frowned at me. They would think nothing of—of——"

She could not say the word, but she unclasped her hands and laid one of them against her throat. He saw that a fine blue vein ran up the right side of her neck; and it seemed to Sherry that he was looking through translucent white and seeing that vein, deeply hidden.

"Great Scott!" said Sherry. "What are you thinking of? Do you think that people would allow such a thing? Do you think that there are jail doors that

would hold you? Do you think that there are not hands which would bring you safely out?"

He held such a hand out to her, not as one who calls attention to himself, but as a man speaking out of the heat of emotion which gathers him up as a strong draft gathers up a powerful flame. He was a magnificent man, this Lewis Sherry, not meant to be ironed out into a common background of stiff white shirt fronts, and black dinner jackets. Out of such a background little appears except grace, and cunning, stinging words; but Sherry looked at that moment like a glorious animal with hands as strong as metal, and with the divine mind all on fire for action.

She looked at him from foot to head, and suddenly she smiled on him.

"*You* would tear the doors open for me!" she said in the same husky voice.

Then as though she gathered strength from him, and from the thought, she lifted herself from the chair and came to him, still smiling. She stood just under him, so that she had to bend back her head a little to look up into his face, and a sad sense of sweetness, like the fragrance of late roses in the fall of the year, possessed Sherry. He wanted to ask her not to smile, her beauty and her nearness made his heart ache so with the knowledge that she trusted him so deeply, and that she was so near perishing.

"I'll never lose all heart again," she told him. "I see that you believe in me!"

"I do," said Sherry. "I believe in you!"

He could manage to make the words simple, but he could not take control of his voice, which rumbled out in a great organ peal, a declaration of faith. If he had said that he loved her, that he worshiped her, that he would serve her in all possible ways, it could not have been put more clearly than by all that his voice inferred. And she glowed beneath him. The weariness and the trouble that had marked her face disappeared, and out of her shone that light which joy kindles in a beautiful girl.

She was saying: "If you want to help me, go to Doctor Layman. If any one knows a way of doing things for me now, he is the man. Tell him that I asked you to go to him. And oh, if you wish to help me, follow what he says! For he's wiser than all the rest. He's even wiser than the sheriff—and so much kinder!"

He knew that he was close to some frantic declaration, and because he was ashamed to break out, and because, too, the mention of another man had somehow brought a soberer touch to him, he left her at once and stumbled out into the garden.

He was met by blinding light. During the brief time he had been in the room with the girl the wind had changed, and the dark cloud masses, no longer shooting south, were rolling toward the northeast in walls and towers between which the rich blue of the sky reached through. It was nearly sunset; the light was golden; hope suddenly filled the world—and also the heart of Lewis Sherry.

The sheriff had gone off to the town, and Sherry found the man he wanted pacing up and down through the garden, pausing now and then to kick at a stone, his head bent toward the earth.

"Beatrice Wilton told me to come to you," said Sherry. "She said that you would know what to tell me to do."

The doctor looked up at him by degrees; his hands were locked behind his back, which made his slender figure seem yet more spare, so that he looked to Sherry, at the moment, a very type of the intellectual—his physical existence was so dominated by that imposing brow.

"She sent you to me?" queried the doctor.

"Yes."

"The deuce she did!" murmured Layman.

He actually walked on, kicking the small stones out of his way as he went, and yet Sherry was not offended, for he told himself that it was the sheer excess of sorrow of mind that forced Layman to be rude.

At length, coming to the end of the path, the doctor turned upon him and said slowly: "She sent you to me. Did she say what right you had to come to talk to me about her?"

"She said," quoted Sherry, "that you would know what I could do to help her."

"To help her? Does she need help?" asked the doctor in the same sharp way.

Sherry was a little irritated.

"After her talk with the sheriff," said he, "I think that she does."

"The sheriff was stubborn, was he?" murmured Layman. "I believe he has that reputation. But she couldn't do anything with him?"

"Nothing but tell her story," said Sherry.

"And that did no good?"

"Not a bit—so far as I could see."

Then Sherry added: "Suppose I ask just why she sent me to you for orders?"

The doctor looked at him in doubt. Then he shrugged his shoulders.

"Suppose I say that we're engaged to be married. Would that make any further explanation necessary?"

CHAPTER XIX.

WHERE ARE THE PEARLS?

THE vague hopes that had been rising in the mind of Sherry were rebuffed. As a strong wind will clear away mist suddenly, so the passion of Sherry was blown to tatters in an instant. Then, slowly, he settled himself to face the new problem.

"I don't mind saying that it makes a lot of difference," he said quietly.

"I thought so," said the doctor. "It takes a well-balanced youngster to see Beatrice a few times without losing his head."

He nodded at Sherry. It was really impossible to take offense at this bluntness on his part, for it was plain that he was partly thinking out loud, partly expressing a viewpoint to another. There was no malice in his manner. It was simply the expression of a calm conviction. So Sherry made no answer.

The doctor went on in his rather irritated manner:

"That may change your viewpoint altogether, as a matter of fact?"

"About helping her?" asked Sherry.

"Exactly."

"No," said Sherry, "it doesn't at all."

"Ha! I wonder!" said the doctor.

He began to pace up and down again, kicking in his half-abstracted and half-venomous way at the small stones in the path. He halted, with his back turned.

"No one can help her without pouring his whole heart into the job!"

"I suppose not," answered Sherry.

Layman swung about on him.

"You're free to go. You know that," he said. "You won't get the ten thousand that you were hired for."

Sherry did not reply to this. He wondered if the other were trying to torment him as a test of his temper and of his steadfastness.

"You're not going?" inquired Layman.

"No."

"In addition, there may be danger in staying about this place and trying to help Beatrice. Have you thought of that?"

"More sailors, do you mean?" asked Sherry.

"Ha?" exclaimed the doctor. Then he went on, thoughtfully: "You've looked a little way beneath the surface, at least!"

"Thank you," said Sherry, dryly.

"Don't be proud! Don't be proud!" said the doctor. "There will be plenty of time for you to show what you're made of before this little affair is over."

He laughed suddenly, and added: "I can assure you of that! Plenty of time, and plenty of ways!"

He went up to Sherry and gripped his arm with such force that the big man was surprised.

"You went down to the hotel. Did you find out anything about Fennel? Did you find out anything about the murderer?"

"I found out that he's pretty deep," said Sherry.

"In what way? What did you find out?"

"He posed as a drunkard. Matter of fact, he probably never touched a drop except in public."

"Ha?" said the doctor. "How could that be? I've said that he was a victim of alcoholic poisoning. Do you think that I imagined it, my friend?"

"Good-by," said Sherry.

"What?"

Sherry walked off, but Layman followed after him and touched his arm.

"You're right," he said, when the other turned again. "I have no right to take advantage of your generous attitude toward Beatrice—and me. But the fact is that I'm half mad. This thing has upset me, naturally. You see that, Sherry? As a matter of fact, I value your help hugely. It might make the difference of the turning of the scale."

"I hope so."

"So go on and tell me about the sailor—the pretended sailor—whatever he was. You say that he didn't drink?"

"I don't go against a doctor's word. I suppose you know your business."

"I'm not a genius of the profession," said Layman. "But I think I know alcoholism when I see it. It's not the rarest disease in this part of the world."

"Very well. I tell you only what I know. I've been in Fennel's room twice. I saw that more than a bottle of whisky had been used up between visits. Well, that seemed incredible. A man with more than a quart of whisky in him doesn't walk up a path and confront another as Fennel confronted Wilton a while ago—even allowing that he's a freak and can carry twice as much liquor as a normal man."

"More than a quart? Of course not! That's impossible for human nature, without making a man nearly senseless, I suppose."

"Very well. The liquor was gone. I looked about to find how it had vanished. And I saw a little trap set into the lead of the drainage pipe. I went down below. The ground was reeking with whisky fumes. There you are. Its fairly clear that if Fennel drank enough to have alcoholic poisoning, he dodged a lot more by pouring the stuff down the pipe."

"What idiots," said Layman, "men can be! There's a fellow with murder planned, and incidentally he wanted to work up a great reputation as a drinker. And so the drainage pipe scheme. Well —— And still there's no trace of Fennel! And the fool of a sheriff," he went on, "is trying to hang the guilt on the shoulders of Beatrice Wilton! Heaven, forgive him for a blind man!"

"I don't see this—why should Fennel have killed Wilton?"

"Is that strange? He couldn't get what he wanted. Look at his clothes. Rags and tatters. And a beggar never gets enough. He wants nothing less than a fortune laid into his hands. So with our friend Fennel. He couldn't get what he wanted. So he used a gun."

"I don't see him using a gun with a silencer," said Sherry. "He didn't impress me as that type. A common 'fore-the-mast sailor would hardly go in for the niceties."

"You forgot what the newspapers do for people these days," said the doctor

bitterly. "They not only suggest crimes, but they also suggest safe ways of working them. If murders were never reported in the public prints, you'd find the lists cut down ten per cent in no time!"

"But there was Fennel," persisted Sherry, "not asking for a great deal. Apparently, all that he wanted was enough to keep drunk on. Wilton would have given him that much."

"Wilton was a stubborn fellow," said the doctor. "What makes you think that he would have given it?"

"Because he was almost frightened to death," said Sherry.

"Are you sure of that?"

"I walked down the path behind him. He hardly could keep himself in hand."

"Fennel a sham—Wilton frightened to death by a sham—hands pointing at Beatrice—great Heaven," said Layman, "who can see through this muddle?"

They were interrupted by the arrival of the sheriff, the coroner, and the coroner's jury, who had been hastily gathered. They were brought into the living room of the Wilton house, where the murdered man had been placed on a couch. He looked very pale and peaceful to Sherry, with the smile of death on his lips. And yet that death seemed more horrible than usual in such a place, for all the process of a normal life was scattered about—a newspaper here, a book, open and face down, there. The disarray of the chair, the rumpled corner of a rug, all seemed to make it impossible to believe that Oliver Wilton lay dead.

The coroner was a fat man whose wind was quite gone. He dropped into a chair and fanned himself with his hat.

"Pretty neat room, ain't it?" said he. "I never been here before. You, Pat?"

Pat admitted that it was his first visit.

"That's the trouble with a lot of these rich swells," declared the coroner. "They're above the common people. They got no time for them. And then the first thing that they know, they trip up their heels, and they got to have just as much law around as the next man!"

There was general agreement with this statement.

Then the coroner ordered the room to be cleared except for the clerk, the sheriff, and the first witness, who was to be Doctor Layman.

Back to the garden went Sherry and Pete Lang. And the face of Pete was serene and happy.

Sherry said to him quietly: "I suppose you're heading back for the range, Pete?"

"And why?" asked Pete.

"Because you're through here, as far as I can make out."

"And how do you make it out, son. Will you tell me that?"

"Your boss is dead, Pete. There's no more money here for you."

"Then I'll be a dog-gone philanthropist," said Lang, "and work on just for sheer patriotism, as you might call it."

"To hang a girl if you can?" asked Sherry coldly.

"That rides you, partner, don't it?" asked Pete.

Sherry was silent, and Lang looked calmly upon the stern face of his friend.

"I'm gunna work, and work," said he. "I never felt more at home than I do right now. The law can do what it wants, but I got an idea that Pete Lang is the one that's gunna prove the case!"

"What makes you think that?"

"Lemme ask you—what become of the letter that Wilton received from Fennel?"

"I forgot about that. It must be in his coat pocket. I remember that he put it there!"

"I remembered, too. And here it is!"

He spread it out in the hand of Sherry, and the latter read:

DEAR SKIPPER: So that we can cut the business short, suppose that you cum along

with some of the pearls? I don't ask for much. Just say that you bring along a handful, and not of the smallest. That wood hold me. I don't want to rob you. I just want my shair. Respectfully,

FENNEL.

"But he didn't bring the pearls," said Sherry, "and so he was murdered."

"Didn't he bring them? What do you think of this?" asked Pete calmly.

And, scooping a hand into his pocket, he brought it out with the palm well filled with the milky luster of a heap of pearls!

CHAPTER XX.

BEFORE THE JURY.

OVER these jewels they bowed their heads. They were by no means of uniform size, shape, or quality; but some were like small pears, and others were irregular globes, and others, again, were what are called *perle boutons* by jewelers, that is to say, flat on the bottom, and formed like hemispheres. There were very small pearls, and there was one pear-shaped jewel of considerable size.

"You're going to show those to the coroner and his jury?" asked Sherry.

"Of course," said Lang. "These and the letter. They're testimony, ain't they?"

"You're not going to show them," declared Sherry firmly.

"And why not, Tiny? Is there anything else in the case that argues as much as this?"

"And what does it argue?" asked Sherry.

"That Fennel never killed Wilton."

"How do you make that out?"

"That's a simple trick. Look here. Fennel writes to Wilton. 'Bring me down a flock of pearls,' says he. Wilton does it. Still, Fennel shoots him? Why, I ask you? It ain't reasonable and it ain't likely. A gent holds up Wilton. Wilton comes through with the goods. At least, he takes down the stuff that's asked for. He wouldn't 've done that if he hadn't intended to pass them over."

"And then?"

"Then what happened is easy to guess. The girl, all worked up about things, comes through the woods, sees Wilton, and takes a crack at him. He drops on his face. Fennel, scared to death, figures that his turn is coming next—maybe that the bullet really was meant for him. He beats it into the trees."

"Why should he chuck off hat and shoes and coat?"

"Why not? He wants to make tracks as fast as he can go. As he goes whisking through the brush his hat is knocked off. He can't make time in that long overcoat—you remember that it pretty near dragged the ground?—so he throws that off. And still his shoes are in his way. Look at the size of those shoes. Twelves, I'd say! Well, he chucks those shoes off, too, and goes on barefooted."

"Through that rough going?"

"What's rough going to a sailor that's hardened up his feet using them bare to go aloft on iron-hard cordage?"

Sherry, stumped and disgusted with this perfect logic, still struggled.

"Look at it another way," he suggested. "They walk down the path together, Fennel and Wilton. Fennel wants to see the goods, and Wilton shows him the pearls. Fennel says they're not enough. That's the point, perhaps, where they stop and argue. You remember?"

"Yes."

"Wilton insists that's all he'll give to Fennel. Fennel gets angry. Finally he pulls a gun and shoots Wilton down, in a blind rage."

"And goes on without taking the pearls which he's just seen Wilton, by your account, drop back into his coat pocket?"

"Yes, because he's too frightened by what he's done."

"Tell me straight, Sherry. Was Fennel the sort of a fellow who would be easily scared?"

Sherry bit his lip. Certainly Fennel had appeared to be a man who had plenty of nerve.

"Half a second to lean over and drag out this stuff. Was Fennel the fellow to overlook such a sure bet as that?" went on Lang, triumphant in his progress toward the truth.

Then he summed up: "Fennel couldn't have been shown those pearls, if he committed the murder. And he wouldn't have shot unless he'd had a chance to see them. And once having seen them, he would of taken them along when he bolted."

"Maybe the pearls were only a dodge with him," suggested Sherry. "Perhaps he only wanted to use the pearls as a snare to trap Wilton and get him out into the garden?"

"You can fit in a 'perhaps' to pretty near anything," said Lang; "but I tell you this, old son, when I finish telling my yarn to the coroner and his jury, I'll lay the long odds that they put the girl in jail charged with murder in the first degree."

"And that," said Sherry, "is what you're not going to do."

"Hello!" cried Lang. "And why not?"

"She's got to have a fair chance," said Sherry. "You can't stack the cards against her."

"Stack the cards? I'm not pulling any tricks against her. What have I got against the girl?"

"You hate them all—everything in skirts," said Sherry. "Isn't that true?"

"I see through them," answered Lang. "They've smashed my life. They've double crossed me every turn!"

"But here's one case where you're going to talk soft and be nice," said Sherry.

"Are you as hard hit as that?" asked his friend.

"I am."

"You want me to hold out this stuff?"

"I do."

Lang groaned.

"Don't you see, man," he urged, "that the girl's a cold-blooded little piece? She's too pretty to be good, in the first place!"

"She's got a hard enough row to hoe now," answered Sherry. "When the sheriff and I broke into her room, she tried to shoot herself. That's about enough to finish her, I suppose, when the sheriff gets through talking. I ask you again—will you give her a chance, man?"

At this, Pete Lang struck a hand against his forehead.

"Here's my only pal," said he, "comes to me and says: 'Pete, old man, for the sake of old times, will you gimme a chance to tie a rope around my neck and hang myself from your front door?' What am I to say? Boy, boy, you'd never get nothing out of her except a big laugh when she was in the clear!"

"You may be right," said Sherry.

"What do you think yourself about her?"

"Lord knows!"

"Tiny, you think that she's guilty!"

"I do," groaned Sherry.

"But you'd carry on?"

"I love her," said Sherry, with a sad simplicity.

Lang rolled a cigarette with fumbling fingers.

"You love her," he said. "You gotta chuck yourself away for her! By grab, it's always that way. The straight gents love the poison!"

He lighted his cigarette, and through swirling smoke his tormented eyes stared at his friend.

Sherry held out his hand and waited, and finally Lang made a convulsive gesture, of last argument.

"They'll jail her and try her, without this," he said. "But with this handful of stuff, they'll hang her. Without it they won't, I should say. They'll only

hang a doubt on her that'll disgrace her all her life, until a poor sucker like you comes along and marries her—and gets his throat cut a couple of months later."

The hand of Sherry still waited in mid-air, and at last Lang clutched and shook it with vigor.

"I'm wrong," he said. "I'm turning loose another plague on the world, and all because it wears a pretty face! Lord forgive me for the damage that she's gunna do!"

"We've got plenty of other things to do around here," said Sherry. "We want to run down the whole secret life of this Oliver Wilton. It may be that we'll learn enough to clear her altogether. You're fighting on my side now, Pete?"

Lang nodded mournfully.

"But mind you, son," he cautioned gravely, "the best thing that we can do is to turn in our evidence straight, and then pack and ride for the range. We never have had any luck in Clayrock. We're never going to have any luck. And there you are! It's my hunch. I've given you a fair warning."

To this Sherry made no answer, for the door opened, and he was summoned in before the coroner to give his testimony.

They wore gloomy, stern faces, these twelve men. One might have thought that they had eaten something extremely bitter to the taste, so were their mouths puckered and awry.

The coroner was no stickler for form or legalities. He said directly: "Things look bad for the girl, Sherry. Now, what you gotta say about her at the murder?"

Sherry looked slowly around the room.

"Nothing," he answered at last.

At this, the sheriff rose from his chair.

"You've said things in my presence, Sherry. I want you to say them again. It's your duty."

"My duty?" said Sherry. "My duty to help toward the hanging of a girl I know is innocent?"

He said that in such a ringing voice that the jury started of one accord, and the fat coroner so hastily clapped his spectacles upon his nose that they dropped off at once before he could examine Sherry carefully.

"What you think," said the coroner, "ain't specially interesting just here and now, Sherry. We think that you're a straight shooter—both ways of using the word. Now we want to know what you seen and heard and did to-day, about the time that Wilton was murdered? And though I take a lot of interest in a gent that's willing to help a poor girl, still, justice has gotta have its chance in the game. I ask you, man to man, will you talk out?"

Sherry raised a finger at them.

"I can tell you what I saw and heard," said he, "but I can't tell you what I felt. And that's what counts. And every man of you that has a wife, and every man of you that has a daughter, knows what I mean."

"That's not testimony," said the sheriff.

"The coroner runs this court, I believe, and not the sheriff," said Sherry icily.

"My dear lad," said the quiet voice of Moon, "we have our own way of fulfilling the law in this county; but we know testimony when we hear it. We don't want your opinions. We want your facts."

"To hound Beatrice Wilton!" exclaimed Sherry, black rage swallowing his judgment. He stepped toward the sheriff. "But if you're loading the dice against her," said he, "I want you to know that there are those who will stop your game."

"Hold on, young man!" exclaimed the coroner.

The jury gazed at the audacious Sherry with frightened eyes. For

twenty-five years the sheriff had played a something more than human rôle in that community.

"He's young," said Herbert Moon as gently as ever. "He's young and he has a heart—a big heart, and a hot one. I hold nothing against him, but I think you'll get nothing worth while out of the testimony of Sherry, coroner."

"It looks like you're right," agreed the corner. "Sherry, are you gunna talk, or do we have to bind you over for contempt—is that the right word, sheriff?"

"If you think that you need more testimony—yes," said the sheriff. "I suppose that we can hold him until he'll talk."

"If we need more?" muttered the coroner. "Well, we'll try Pete Lang, next. Sherry, we're finished with you, for a while."

So Sherry walked from the room, and found the doctor walking up and down the hall outside. He cast a bitter eye upon Sherry as Lang was called in to play his part of witness.

"You meant well, Sherry," said he, "but do you think that holding back in this fashion will be of any real use to Beatrice? They'll all guess blacker things than you could have said about her actions!"

Sherry did not answer. He felt that he had played a foolish part. This was a riddle which wits could not solve. But perhaps main force of hand could serve his purpose. So he looked darkly upon Layman and said nothing.

CHAPTER XXI.

WHAT COURAGE CAN'T DO.

THE testimony of Lang was as disappointing as that of Sherry. He did not refuse to talk, but he refused to say anything of importance. "I don't know," was his invariable answer when he seemed to have been crowded into a corner, and at last the coroner said to the jury: "You boys can see for yourself. Lang won't talk; he's an old bunkie of Sherry's!"

They dismissed Lang.

The witnesses were not allowed to be present at the pronouncing of the verdict, but through the door the voice of the foreman was plainly heard declaring that in the estimation of twelve citizens of that jury, Beatrice Wilton was guilty of murder by shooting Oliver Wilton with "Exhibit A," which was the girl's own revolver, displayed upon a table in front of the coroner, together with the cast-off clothes of Fennel, and other items of interest in the case. She would be held in the Clayrock jail for trial.

But, the verdict having been given, the prisoner surrendered to the sheriff, Sherry and Lang were admitted to the room again. They found all the men in the room wearing long faces, unwilling to look at one another, with the exception of the sheriff, whose expression never varied, it seemed. A cheerful quiet always possessed his eye, and he looked as brightly and calmly upon Sherry and Lang and the girl as upon any of the jurors.

The latter were anxious to leave, but the sheriff would not let them go at once.

In the meantime, Beatrice Wilton sat by the window, utterly different from what she had been before. Sherry had dreaded facing her; he had expected that the strain would have broken down her nerve strength entirely and left her a wreck; but instead, she appeared perfectly calm and self-possessed. She and the sheriff alone had themselves under perfect control, while Layman went up to her, with Sherry and Lang as a sort of rear guard.

Layman sat down beside her and took her hand.

"Beatrice," he said, "it's going to be a long, hard fight!"

She looked at him without answering word or gesture; and her quiet manner

staggered Sherry. If she had strength enough for this, she had strength enough for anything, he told himself—strength enough, say, for the slaying of a man! And once more the overwhelming surety of her guilt possessed his mind.

But there were compensating facts, if only they could be known; and he would know them, if there were strength in him, and wit in Lang, to unravel the skein of mystery.

Layman went on: "We'll need every penny we can put our hands on."

"You can sell some stock for me, Eustace," she replied.

"As soon as you give me power of attorney, and full rights to act for you, of course."

"Yes, naturally."

"But in the first place, I intend to close the house and discharge the servants, Beatrice."

"Of course."

"And these good fellows who have wanted so much to help you, dear."

He nodded to Sherry and Lang.

"Yes, naturally," said she.

But here Lang put in: "We ain't hired men, ma'am, but we're volunteers. If we could have a chance to look through that house when we want to, it might be that we could turn up some things that would be useful to you."

"My dear Lang," said the doctor blankly, "what on earth could you discover in the house?"

"Enough, maybe, to save Miss Wilton," replied the puncher.

"Lang," began the doctor, "of course I know that you have the best will in the world, but——"

Beatrice Wilton leaned forward a little and raised a hand to silence Layman.

"You already know something," said she. "I'm sure that you know something that the coroner hasn't heard, Pete?"

She let that familiar name fall with such a gentle intonation that Sherry saw his hardy friend start a little; and he smiled in dour understanding.

But to this question Layman interposed: "My dear Beatrice, don't you see that it's going to make everything more difficult for me if I have to divide my time between the house and——"

"And the jail?" she finished for him, undisturbed.

Even Layman, cool as ice ordinarily, now flushed a little.

"I can't very well be in two places at once," he complained.

"Of course you can't. So let Lew Sherry and Pete Lang stay in the house."

"There's every reason against it," urged Layman. "These are known men, Beatrice."

"Known?" she echoed, raising her brows a little.

"I don't want to insult them. It's no insult to say that they're known to have come here as guards to your uncle!"

"But what has that to do with me?"

"Don't you see? You'd have them up on the hill like a sort of standing army, ready to rush down and smash the jail open, say, in case the trial went against you. Isn't that obvious? People know Sherry, particularly. He has a long and —efficient—record behind him. You understand, Beatrice, that from the very first, you must try to win public opinion to your side of the case! And you can't do that when you have two aces up your sleeve—and everybody knows about them! It's really very important. You ought to see that, dear."

"I didn't dream that it could mean so much," said she. "Of course, if that's the way of it, we'll just have to close the house."

"Naturally," said Layman. "Great Scott, what a blunder to have posted them up there like a pair of trained eagles on a crag! If you win, you win; if you lose the case, the pair of them come and split open the jail and take you out!"

Sherry could see the point of this argument clearly enough, but Lang persisted with much solemnity. He leaned a little closer to the girl and said slowly: "I think that I might turn up something worth while at the house. Serious and sober, ma'am, I'd like to try."

She looked earnestly at the puncher. Then: "Well, Eustace?" she asked.

The doctor hesitated. He looked at the girl rather than at Lang.

"Lang is a keen fellow," he said suddenly. "If he has an idea, let him try his best, of course. We can't afford to turn down any chances, no matter how small."

"That's settled, then, and the two of you will be there?"

She looked to Sherry and he, in turn, bowed his great, heavy bulk above her chair.

"You have small chances, anyway," said he, "and never a better chance than right now."

She looked fixedly up at him, not frightened, but thoughtful, considering; and again his judgment said to him, "Guilty!" and again his heart leaped and reveled in her beauty, and drove him on.

"What chance?" she asked him.

"Here are three of us," he replied. "I can answer for Pete. If Layman hasn't a gun, I can lend him an extra Colt. The coroner is a fossil. The jury has not more than two fighting men in the whole outfit. We're not more than six steps from the door. Get up from your chair and walk straight for the door. You'll be halfway there before any one challenges you. Then run. We'll cover your going and pile out behind you——"

"The sheriff?" she said.

"If Moon draws a gun," said Sherry through his teeth, "Heaven help him!"

"Eustace!" whispered the girl.

Layman, his face white, but his eyes very bright, listened, and said not a word. Lang dropped a hand upon the massive shoulder of his friend. It was his silent consent.

"It's your one real chance," said Sherry. "Do you understand me? For life!"

"Where could we go?"

"I'll find a place to take you. Lang and the doctor and I will take care of you."

"Sherry and Lang!" called the sheriff. "He suspects something. Now is your time!" said Sherry.

"You mean it?"

"Yes, yes. But quickly!"

Suddenly, color leaped into her face.

"Not one step!" said the girl. "Why—it would be ruin for you, all three."

"Sherry!" said the sheriff.

Sherry turned heavily away and Herbert Moon went halfway across the room to meet him.

"I love a brave man," said the sheriff, "but, my dear young fellow, even courage shouldn't attempt to move mountains!"

To be continued in next week's issue of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE.

False Freedom~

by Kenneth Gilbert

Author of "Bear and Forbear," etc.

SILENCE had fallen over the big fox farm in the Upper Tuhuya. At dusk, there had been a frenzied clamoring throughout the pens, as the keepers passed from one to another, ladling out the mash of ground meat and cereal to the various feed boxes, where it was promptly consumed, yet not without more-or-less-harmless battling among the hundred or more furred charges who partook of this bounty. These foxes were silver blacks, aristocrats of their kind, but for the most part they were ill-mannered and ill-tempered, as compared to their humbler kinsmen, the blue foxes, who were sociable by nature, and tractable always. So vicious were the silver blacks that only when they were young, could they be trusted together. Nature had given them beautiful coats of glossy black, tipped with long guard hairs, but she had also given them a most savage disposition. Worth from a thousand to two thousand dollars each, they were the pride and despair of the keepers.

And, biggest and handsomest of all these royal vulpines, as well as most vindictive and aggressive, was Talapus, whose ancestry ran straight back through many generations to a wild pair of silver-black foxes trapped on an island off Labrador. Talapus was king of the fox farm on the Upper Tuhuya, and his arrogance had grown until, doubtless, he believed that he could be king of all wild foxes as well throughout that region, if he gained his liberty. Twice he had nearly killed other highly valued males, for no reason apparent to the keepers; and on more than one occasion he had set his teeth in the hand of the man who fed him. Yet he was a beautiful specimen, magnificent in size and pelage, and his lineage was so blue-blooded and unquestioned that he had escaped being "pelted," the fate which usually overtakes a fox who, through age or general uselessness, is no longer worth any more than the value of his own furry coat. Talapus was in his prime, and, had his disposition been less savage, nothing less than an exorbitant sum

could have purchased him. King of his kind he was, yet his sovereignty was threatened with death, as fitting retribution for his many crimes.

Tim Pursley, head keeper of the fox farm, summed it up that night when all of them had gathered about the stove in the bunk house, for a bedtime smoke.

"He snapped at me again to-night," Tim remarked, holding up his right hand, which was scarred from fox bites of the past—and some of these marks had been left by the teeth of Talapus himself. "If I hadn't been too quick for him, he'd have nailed me. I'm thinkin' I'd have killed him then and there, deservin' death as he does! Then I'd have lost me job, and I'd be owin' the boss a tidy sum of money. But it would have been worth it, the beautiful black rascal that Talapus is!"

Hartman, a younger man and a newcomer to the fox farm, spoke up. The others regarded him with mild surprise, for he was not given to words as a rule. He was a silent, moody type.

"I know how you feel," he told Pursley, "but at the same time I know you wouldn't have killed Talapus. None of us would—we're not built that way, or we wouldn't be here, handling these foxes. We think too much of 'em. Anyway, I believe Talapus can be cured. And if he is cured, he'll then be one of the most valuable black foxes in the world."

He paused a moment, and then addressed Pursley again:

"I don't like to seem to be butting in too much, but I've got a hunch as to what is wrong with Talapus. He's got the big head and, like a human being who is too swelled up with his own importance, Talapus needs a taking down.

"I've been studying him since I came here. I think I know something about black foxes; I flatter myself that I know something about all dumb animals, particularly wild ones. Talapus was born and raised in a pen. All his life he's been pampered; existence has been too easy for him. He's grown to think that all life is that way. Because he can whip any other fox on the place, he has an idea that a man wouldn't be too much for him to handle. Not only do I think Talapus can be cured, but I believe I can cure him!"

Pursley looked up with interest. "How?" he demanded.

Young Hartman smiled, shook his head.

"I hardly dare tell you now," he replied. "But if I have your permission, I'll try. Anyway, I'm willing to bet my job that I'm right."

Old Tim grunted, unconvinced.

"Riddles weary me, son," he reproved. "If ye have some trick that I've never heard about, in all my years handlin' foxes, I'm right willin' to learn. Go ahead—and if ye win, it's Tim Pursley that'll be bobbin' his head to ye ivery time we meet!"

Hartman laughed, and got up. "It's a bet!" he agreed.

So it was that silence had fallen over the big fox farm. Although the night was warm and pleasant, and a great honey-colored moon was lifting above the rim of the hills, the pens seemed empty, for the foxes had crawled into the various shelters. Unlike their ancestors who hunted at night, these foxes were pen born and raised, and food came to them daily without effort There was no struggle to obtain it; therefore, they loafed about the pens by day and slept at night, except during the love moon, when they would be restless and on the move at all hours.

But Talapus was not asleep, nor was he in the shelter which he occupied alone because his growing ferocity made it unsafe for him to be turned

into a pen with other males. He was standing in a corner of the pen, his silver-black body—which in the strengthening moonlight took on a marvelous sheen—pressed against the stout wire mesh which separated him from the freedom he craved. His catlike eyes, with the slitted pupils, were wide and very bright as he stared off into the forest which came up to the edge of the fox farm. He craved freedom now more than ever before. He hated his keepers, hated these kindly men who fed him regularly each day. There was nothing of gratitude in the heart of Talapus that while his wild kinsmen were constantly driven to find food in order that they might live, the problem was solved miraculously for him.

Particularly did he hate old Tim Pursley, whom he had bitten several times. However, toward the newcomer, Hartman, the big dog-fox cherished less ill feeling than toward the others. Hartman seemed more like a friend, and an understanding friend, at that. True, Talapus would have bitten Hartman, had he been given the opportunity; nevertheless, he felt a sort of kinship for the man who laid claim to an understanding of all dumb animals, particularly those not far removed from the wild state.

But a short time before, Hartman had visited Talapus at the latter's pen, and had talked in low tones, encouragingly, to the big fox. Then Hartman had busied himself with the wire mesh at one corner of the inclosure. After that, Hartman had gone away, leaving the moody Talapus standing there, staring off into the woods.

At last Talapus began pacing back and forth in the rather roomy inclosure where he lived. There was no sound as his soft pads pressed the hard-packed earth, beneath which was spread a floor of wire mesh that he might not dig out of the place. Back and forth he went, turning at a corner of the pen with a flick of his thick brush, which was tipped with white; his very attitude indicated growing impatience. There was no apparent reason why he should be disturbed, yet there had come to him a message from the near-by woods which he interpreted clearly. In fact, for several nights now he had received the same message. Of all the keepers at the fox farm, perhaps only young Hartman understood what it was that troubled Talapus, for Hartman, for two nights previous, had watched this same nervous parading. But Hartman had gone to bed now, after visiting the pens. Yet, Talapus kept up his ceaseless marching, while the great moon swept majestically upward toward the zenith.

At last the dog-fox paused in an attitude of listening. But there was no sound which could have been distinguished by human ears. Nevertheless, the various shelter pens began to disgorge foxes. It seemed that they, too, sensed the same thing which had been troubling Talapus. They, too, stood there in an attitude of listening, facing the near-by forest, their ears perked forward expectantly.

Presently, one of the darker shadows detached itself from the edge of the gloom-filled woods. Then another, and still another. Into the clearing, hesitantly, for fear that they might be approaching a trap, trotted three foxes. They paused out there in the moonlight, and then moved slowly toward the pens.

Two of them were red foxes, one of goodly size, but the third, smallest of the three, was a silver black, with as beautiful a coat as that worn by Talapus himself. Moreover, this third fox seemed more graceful, modeled along finer lines, from slender legs to a sharper nose. Even a tyro could have seen that this silver black was a vixen. For that matter, the smaller of the two red foxes was a vixen, also,

but the size of the first one indicated a dog-fox. All three came close to the pen of Talapus, and stood there, staring at him in curiosity, if not in pity.

Presently, the silver-black vixen gained courage, for she came close enough to the mesh to touch, or nearly so, the nose of the big fox within the inclosure. For a moment this tableau held, and unquestionably there was exchange of thought, although neither fox made a sound. Yet, of a sudden, she crouched flat on the ground, in an attitude of playfulness, while she wagged her tail slowly.

Still, Talapus did not relax in his attitude of aloof dignity; but the red dog-fox trotted up close to the pen and seemed to regard the magnificent silver black inside with disdain. The newcomer shook his head, bared his teeth at the coquettish vixen until she shrank aside, and then calmly turned away, the second vixen, the red one, following him. He started toward the woods.

Halfway there, however, he paused to look back. The silver-black vixen was regarding him doubtfully, as though debating in her mind whether to stay and continue her friendship with the captive Talapus, or to rejoin the red dog-fox. Apparently, she decided that the latter course was wiser, for with a single backward glance at Talapus, she trotted after the others. The three vanished into the depths of the forest.

For fully five minutes Talapus stood there, staring at the spot where they were last seen. All this time he had maintained the royal dignity which became him so well, but now he shed it abruptly. Back and forth in his pen he raced at top speed, silently, but with a peculiar intensity in every movement. Suddenly he lurched against the wire mesh at a corner of the pen, as he had done many time before.

Always the stout wires had hurled him back, but now an odd thing happened. The mesh gave way! The weight of his body had forced the wire away from the corner post.

For an instant he regarded this amazing fact; then, as realization of what it meant came to him, he leaped at the wire again. It sagged still more. Another leap, and the opening was large enough to get his head through. At the fourth surge, the wire carried away, and Talapus went through. He was free!

Outside the pen, he stood there indecisively, as though debating just what he should do with this liberty, now that he had won it. But not for long did he hesitate. There recurred to him the coy advances of the vixen; he remembered, too, the mocking attitude of the red dog-fox, who seemed to be jeering at the captivity of the silver black. Head held high, nose wrinkling as he sought to pick up the scent of the foxes who had just left, Talapus hurried on toward the woods.

At last the opportunity which he had sought for so long had been vouchsafed him. He would claim the heritage of his wild ancestors; and in the wild he would be a king.

The forest was hushed, with the moon pools lying in great splashes of light in the glades, and across these Talapus moved like a drifting shadow. He had no definite purpose in mind at this moment, save to put himself as far as possible from the fox farm which he had grown to hate. He had won freedom at last, and now that he possessed it, he did not at first know what to do with it. Nevertheless, the memory of that coy vixen who stood before his pen and begged him to come out and join her was still vivid, and he held steadily to the trail she and the two red foxes had left in passing this way. Evidently the trio were determined to travel fast and far in search of game, after visiting the fox farm,

for although Talapus went on at a rapid pace, the trail scent grew no stronger. The foxes ahead were moving as rapidly as he was.

Through the trees the trail went, twisting here and there among clumps of brush, now following along the length of a fallen tree, and now skirting a marshy, boggy spot. At last it struck squarely across a grassy flat, and began climbing a hill. Talapus gained the summit, although his muscles, unaccustomed to long traveling, were beginning to feel the strain. He was just on the point of dipping down through the brush on the opposite side when he stopped, stiffening suddenly, as his nose caught a new and, to him, an unusual scent—a rather strong and musky odor.

Talapus could not make out from where the scent came at first, but finally decided that it emanated from a peculiar, brush clump on the ground just ahead. This was puzzling, unless some small animal was hidden within the strange growth. Suddenly, he saw the whole spiny ball move slightly! As Talapus stood there, feet braced in readiness for an instant leap backward in case danger threatened, he saw the growth slowly untangle itself. From the ground a small, spiny head, with beady eyes, was lifted. And then there came to the ears of the fox a low churring sound.

Talapus had, of course, never seen a porcupine before, and the experience was somewhat bewildering. Yet he was a bold fox, accustomed to having his own way to a large extent, which gave him a sort of royal arrogance; and now he felt sudden anger at the thing which had startled him. Stiff-legged, menacing in his attitude, he came closer to the porcupine.

The latter, as though understanding the uselessness of trying to flee, merely went into an attitude of defense—it humped itself, once more burying its unprotected nose and throat between its forepaws, while its quills stood on end until a phalanx of spears was presented to the enemy. There the porcupine waited, doubtless in vast confidence, for experience had taught it that the average animal dreaded to attack under such circumstances.

Talapus, however, was not an average animal, in that he was inexperienced in the woods. There flamed in the mind of the big dog-fox the thought that here was game, ready for killing, the first game he had ever encountered, for he had been born and raised in a pen. Nevertheless, something warned him to be careful—for what reason, he did not know. So, instead of leaping forward, and killing the porcupine with a single snap and shake of jaws, Talapus merely sidled around behind the prey, as though looking for a better angle from which to attack. Thus it was that his sharp nose all but touched the porcupine's flank.

Instantly, the quill pig went into action. With a movement surprisingly fast for an animal ordinarily sluggish, it backed suddenly, and lashed out with its quill-armed tail. Then, as abruptly, it resumed the old attitude of defense.

But defense was not necessary at this moment, for Talapus, with a squalling yap of pain, had leaped backward, and was pawing frantically at his classic nose, which had miraculously grown a muzzle of whiskers three inches long! The bite and sting of the barbed quills were maddening, and he sought to bury his nose in the soft leaf mold, rub off the agonizing things. He did succeed in breaking them off short, and a few were actually pulled out by his pawing, but the pain was not lessened.

Then panic seized him. He understood that the creature which had seemed such easy prey had hurt him

thus, and he feared a repetition of the experience if he lingered at this spot. Whirling, he raced off through the woods, his magnificent brush drooping.

Nor did he stop until he had nearly exhausted himself. At the edge of a little spring-fed creek, he flung himself on the ground, tongue lolling, while he whimpered at this harsh treatment at the hand of fate. By and by he fell to lapping the water, which was cool and refreshing; yet fully fifteen minutes elapsed before he got to his feet again.

The memory of his terrible experience with the porcupine was still fresh in his mind. Thereafter, he would avoid porcupines as he would avoid death itself. He had learned one lesson which would stick with him throughout life.

But as he regained his breath, and the coolness of the water seemed to draw the pain from his wounds as he buried his muzzle in the stream, a little of his old confidence returned. For one moment he had almost wished that he was back again in his familiar pen; but that weak craving had vanished. He would go on, and no porcupine would again have an opportunity to harm him.

Yet in his mad flight he had lost the trail of the three foxes, and his purpose now was to find it again. He dare not return to the spot where he had left the porcupine, so he struck off in a wide loop through the woods. Because of the density of the brush, he determined to follow the creek for a distance. This was easy enough, for the stream was shallow, and its course was comparatively free from obstacles. Downstream he went, and at the end of three hundred yards, he came to a point where the creek was joined by another.

Here was a good-sized pool, and the keen eyes of Talapus noted the quick movement of dark shadows in the water as he came out on the shore.

Fish! Instinct told him as much, even though he had never seen a fish in its natural element. He was confident, however, that he could catch one with comparative ease. Marking where one trout was hiding beneath the edge of an overhanging bank, the fox stole forward, making no sound, and when he was within striking distance, he leaped.

But he was not quick enough, as he saw too late. The trout, who was a wary old cutthroat, the king of the pool, was under way even while Talapus was in mid-air. With a resounding splash, the fox struck water.

Then, suddenly, he was clawing his way wildly to the bank, something gripping his left hind leg painfully. Talapus knew nothing about steel traps, and had failed to note that just beneath the water at the edge of the bank, was a "set" for mink, placed there the previous spring by somebody who had neglected to remove it during the summer. By some chance, the trap had remained unsprung, until Talapus had unwittingly put his foot into it. Now the thing held him in a firm, pinching grip which was fully as painful as the porcupine quills in his nose.

But the trap was not intended to hold an animal of his size. By main strength he dragged it free and with it the stake driven beneath the water. Once on shore, he fell to biting the seemingly puny thing, but found that his teeth could make no impression upon it. Despairing of trying to crush it, he set off limpingly through the brush, dragging the trap after him. He might have gone on thus indefinitely, had not chance come to his aid.

For the dragging chain and stake caught finally in a clump of brush. Panicky at being held back, Talapus pulled mightily. There was a moment

of acute agony—and then he was free! He had drawn his foot out of the mink trap.

Once more he was in flight, as though he feared that the trap might come to life again, and once more seize him. Like mad, he raced through the woods until his breath failed him and he collapsed in deep grass at the edge of a clearing. For a long time he lay there, panting, bewildered, puzzled, and not a little frightened. The deep woods had revealed terrors, the like of which he had never dreamed. He was hurt, sore, and tired, and in his soul the almost latent emotion of fear had been aroused. At this moment, he wanted nothing so much as to be assured that he was in no danger. So he lay there in the grass, his flanks heaving, while beneath his glossy, silver-black coat, his heart fluttered violently.

Yet he was of royal blood, was Talapus; and after a time, when nothing happened, his courage returned. He got up and began moving slowly through the grass, with every faculty alert, and ready for instant flight if danger threatened. He found himself crossing an old "burn," where a forest fire had passed three years before, and at last he stood on the edge of a canyon whose bottom was covered by an almost impassable network of windfalls. He sniffed down at the depths below, and for some reason which he could not understand, the hair along his back rose. The dank odor from the canyon was traced with some unfamiliar smell, yet instinct warned him of danger.

For that reason, he did not attempt to cross the canyon, as he had intended, but trotted silently along the brink. Soon he came to a steep, gravelly bank, where rains had cut away the soil. He could not climb it, and to go around it would put him considerably out of the way. However, a fallen log which slanted down into the gulch offered a means of getting past the obstructing bank. He was on the point of starting down the log when he observed that a queer-looking animal was already on it, and was crouching there, watching him curiously. At the same instant, his nostrils were again assailed with that peculiar smell which foretold danger.

Talapus stopped doubtfully. He was uneasy, but not alarmed, for he saw that he had the advantage. If the other animal offered him harm, he could turn and flee. In fact, his muscles tensed for that very thing now, as the creature on the log arose abruptly and waddled forward. Talapus whirled about—and stopped dead in his tracks.

For, a few paces distant—behind him—was another creature exactly like the one on the log! He was trapped.

Even then his arrogant heart bade him stand his ground. Talapus had never before faced a wolverene, that dreaded nemesis of the wilds; he saw only that these animals were short-legged, squat, and not so large as himself. Certainly they could not be so quick in their movements. Talapus, therefore, was foolishly tempted to fight it out.

But only for a moment. The second wolverene, who, doubtless, had come out of the canyon to cut him off, snarled suddenly, and started for him. At the same time the wolverene on the log hustled upward. Truculence went out of the heart of Talapus, and he sought flight.

But that was not so easy as it might seem. In fact, there was but one opportunity offered him; if he could gain the summit of the gravel bank, he might vanish swiftly into the woods. The hunting pair of wolverenes had him almost cornered, yet not quite. He sprang toward the gravel bank, his claws digging into the loose soil, and as he did so, the two wolverenes leaped after him.

They were close behind him, but he had the advantage of being more lithe and active. One species of fox actually climbs trees, and the vulpine strain to which Talapus belonged has more than a little of the feline in its nature. Therefore, Talapus went up the bank in marvelous fashion, although at first he would not have believed that he could do it. After him came the wolverenes, but their short legs and heavy bodies were a handicap. Nevertheless, they made it, too, hard behind the harassed fox. Indeed, they were so close that when he would have sprung off into the woods, they barred the way. Along the edge of the bank, then, the three of them raced. Then it seemed that the doom of Talapus had struck.

Before him the earth yawned suddenly, for the canyon took an abrupt turn, and its wall dropped away in a sheer precipice. Talapus could not go ahead because of the precipice, and he could not retreat because of the wolverenes. For an instant he hung on the lip of the cliff, as though minded to leap into space and die on the rocks below rather than meet death in the jaws of the wolverenes. But as they charged him, he slipped nimbly aside, toward a gravel bank to the left. There was no time to get past the wolverenes, and his feint could gain him only a moment or so of life. Yet in his anxiety to avoid that grim pair, he went too far to the edge. Loose earth rattled beneath him; then the next instant he was plunging downward, whirled end over end, while he clawed frantically for a foothold in air. He crashed through brush at the bottom, dislodged more sand, and then came to rest almost in the stream at the bottom of the gully.

Baffled, the wolverenes snarled at him from far above, at the top of the gravel slide. The descent was so steep that it appalled them, even though they were accustomed to taking chances in venturesome leaps. For only an instant they hesitated, however; then they vanished. Talapus understood that they were seeking a safer way to descend to the gully.

But, half-stunned though he was, he had determined that he would not be waiting when the wolverenes arrived. He got weakly to his feet; then, as strength flowed back to him, he crossed the stream and began working his way up the opposite side of the canyon.

Fear gave him added strength. By the time the wolverenes had reached the bottom of the gully, he was well out on the other side, and fleeing madly.

Nor did he pause until he was exhausted. Even then, however, he gave himself but a short rest before resuming his flight. Always, it seemed to him, the wolverenes were hugging closely to his trail, and fear of them drove him to his feet once more. On and on he went, scarcely aware of the direction he was traveling in his desire to escape the persistent death which he believed to be following. It would have taken much to convince Talapus that the wolverenes, wise in their way, had long since given up the chase, realizing that the fox, aided by chance, had outwitted them. To Talapus, it seemed that they were still coming, ever coming.

He came to a broad stream at last, and paused. Had he been a wilderness-bred fox, he might have plunged into it, but sight of the dark and deep water slipping along in the moonlight, awoke misgiving. He swung aside, and began trotting along its bank, with many a fearsome glance thrown over his shoulder, to see if he was still pursued. A swamp barred his way presently, but he slogged through the water and muck, and, dripping and dishevelled, his matchless coat covered with mud and slime, he came out at last to a natural meadow, still awash with

light from the moon which was dipping toward the hills. Through the grass he moved swiftly, nor paused as his nostrils told him of the proximity of small game—a nest of meadow voles beneath a clump of fireweed, and the still-warm bed which a rabbit had just evacuated. Talapus had no thought of food at that moment; he was concerned solely with his own safety. He came out at last to a little knoll, a sort of island in the sea of grass, and there he paused.

It was a vaguely familiar scent which had stopped him. He sniffed the ground here and there, and then his eyes searched the grass about him. Something told him that he was being watched! Something likewise told him that the watcher was another fox!

Indeed, he whirled suddenly, as he realized that the watcher had come up from behind. Suddenly, he saw a form as dark as his own outlined there in the grass. As he moved toward it, half in fear and half in curiosity, it advanced. He saw then that it was the same silver-black vixen that had acted so coquettishly before his pen earlier that night. Apparently, she had cut his trail a mile or two back, and had followed him.

Talapus forgot his fears in that moment. Forgotten were the terrifying experiences through which he had passed. He was unaware that in his bedraggled condition he was far from handsome. His brush, wet and caked with mud, lifted proudly, and he advanced toward the vixen, eyes bright and every step stiff-legged and proud. She stood there, regarding him inscrutably.

And then Talapus stopped, for his nose had caught another scent. Turning his head, he saw the outlines of another fox hard by; nay, there were two others. Here, then, was the trio which had visited him at the pen. The silver-black vixen who had flirted with him; the red vixen who had ignored him, in loyalty to her big red mate, and that red dog-fox himself.

For a long instant Talapus stood there, watching the red dog-fox. The latter regarded the silver black with the same scorn and contempt he had shown when Talapus was within the pen. Indeed, there was insult in his very attitude.

Nor did it escape Talapus. Anger flooded the brain of the silver black. Here, at least, was an enemy Talapus could understand, upon whom he could wreak vengeance for all the distressful happenings of the night. Besides, there was the beautiful silver-black vixen, a prize well worth fighting for. Silently, then, Talapus leaped forward, his jaws gaping for the red fox's throat.

But the fox was not there when those jaws came together. Indeed, he seemed to have vanished in air; yet, the next second, he reappeared suddenly at the side of Talapus, and his teeth all but met in the silver black's shoulder. With a squall of rage, the fighting silver black whirled and snapped at his nimble foe. But the red fox, a veteran of many sanguine battles in the forest glades, again evaded him. And again the red fox counted coup

Then and there began the most terrible ordeal Talapus had ever known. Battler though he knew himself to be, never had he fought such an adversary as this wild fox. The males of the fox farm that Talapus had vanquished were as mere pups in fighting craft compared to this red fox that had never known captivity but had battled against adversity from the beginning. Snap and strike as Talapus would, the red fox slipped inside his guard easily and punished him. The paws of the silver black were dripping red, while the fur about his throat was gashed, yet through some miraculous chance the teeth of the red fox had not

punctured the jugular vein. All the while the battle went on, the two vixens sat by and watched the contest with idle curiosity, their tongues lolling as though in vast good humor over the situation.

Naturally, it was Talapus who tired first, for the red fox seemed to be sinewed with steel. And, as Talapus wearied, the fighting heart went out of him. He could see the shadow of death looming over him. Moreover, as the two battling foxes swung close to the silver-black vixen, she could not forgo the temptation to get into the fight herself. Lightninglike she struck —and it chanced that her sharp teeth sank in the right foreleg of Talapus. She might have intended the bite for the red fox, but Talapus interpreted it otherwise.

Anyway, it was enough. Talapus was through fighting for her favor with a foe that was too fast for him, too skilled in offense and defense. Watching his opportunity, Talapus sprang away and went racing through the grass.

The unexpectedness of the move rather confused the triumphant red fox for a moment; then he was hard in pursuit. Indeed, the two vixens joined him, and the three harried the beaten Talapus across the meadow, through a stand of trees, around the edge of a marsh, and into the depths of another stand. Madly Talapus fled, knowing that his life depended upon it. He had already drawn upon his reserve strength almost to the limit, but he was willing to squander the remainder of it recklessly.

He ran and ran until his breath came in great sobbing gasps, as his tortured lungs rebelled; and all the while that ominous slashing at him from the three pursuing foxes continued. He ran and ran until near-blindness came; but still he continued to hold on.

And then, suddenly, the forest fell away. Before him loomed buildings, familiar buildings. Fox pens! His own pen! But would he make it?

With a last effort, he charged across the clearing, hurled himself through the opening in the wire, and collapsed. As he did so, fighting off faintness, he heard the crowing of a near-by rooster. Dawn was at hand.

The sun rose, and still Talapus lay there. Nor did he move, as he heard a man moving about the pen outside; heard the voice of Hartman, and then was aware that Hartman was nailing back into place the wire which he had left loosened the previous night. Indeed, he was content to lie there while the sun swung toward the zenith, and the air grew hot. It was only when dusk came again, and he heard once more the familiar noises of feeding time, as the keepers ladled out mash, that Talapus aroused. As old Tim Pursley entered the pen watchfully, Talapus looked up at him eagerly—and whined!

Tim blinked; then he noted the bedraggled look of Talapus. On sudden impulse, he leaned over and actually patted the big silver black. And Talapus submitted to the caress!

Old Tim shook his head in puzzled fashion, but grinned.

"If I didn't know ye'd been alone in this pen all the time, I'd say that ye'd been fightin'," he reproved. "The looks av ye is scandalous. How ye got that way, I dunno. I'll be askin' young Hartman about it, I'm thinkin'. Anyway, miracles still happen. Talapus, me b'y, ye're tame!"

Ducks and Drakes

By Seth Ranger

Author of "Hardrock Hunts in Pairs,"

A BLACK storm was roaring out of the North. Seemingly on the wings of the storm came thousands of ducks and geese. Summer had extended into fall, and fall into winter. The Alaskan lakes, marshes, and ponds had not frozen until late. Then, without warning, the storm broke.

"Old Buck" Winslow, crouched in the tules, watched a V formation of mallards against the stormy sky. This was a great moment for Old Buck. He had known ups and downs, had won and lost in the game of life, and had smiled. Rather abruptly, he had realized that he was worthless in mining camp and on range, worthless as a peace officer or game warden. His legs had gone back on him, so he could no longer act as a guide. When the time had come to take stock and squarely face the prospect of an old man's home, Buck had fifteen hundred dollars. He decided to put it to work. He had bought a marshy peninsula that most men thought was worthless. On this he had erected a snug log cabin. The logs had been towed across the bay, several at a time. Then in the tules he had dug several small ponds. He raised some flocks of tame mallards for decoys, bought several dozen wooden ones for the same purpose, stocked the cabin with food, and sent word to a group of wealthy business men that for three hundred dollars each they could have the duck-shooting privileges of the place. They could make their own rules, so long as such rules did not conflict with game laws, and otherwise treat the place as their own. In return, he proposed to keep poachers off the land, to cut fuel, and act as cook during the shooting season.

The Sunday after his letter had been sent, three cars had driven up. The

first man to appear was John P. Standifer. He was tall, firm-jawed, powerful and cold. Though worth millions, he never parted with a dollar unless it would return threefold. His manner invariably seemed a challenge. It was apparent that the nine men with him were leaving details to the natural leader.

"Winslow?" he had inquired, and when Old Buck had replied that he was the writer of the letter, Standifer added, "What makes you think you can give us duck shooting? Others have tried it and failed. The birds won't come in! Besides, the Duke boys, the worst poachers in the country, live two miles away."

"All my life, sir," Buck had answered, "has been spent among rough men on the frontier and among wild animals and birds. I know birds and men. If you'll leave it to me, I'll provide the birds and take care of the lawbreakers. I can get me a deputy game warden's commission."

The sportsmen had looked over the place, and had approved Winslow's layout of cabin, blinds and ponds.

"We'll do this for you," Standifer had informed Buck at the conclusion of the inspection. "We'll try it for the first two weeks of the open season. If we get even half the limit, we'll accept!"

Thus it was that Old Buck's nerves were slightly on edge as he watched the northern birds come in. He checked up on the cost of his venture—fifteen hundred dollars of his own money and two thousand dollars a man had lent him for three months. The three months' use was costing him two hundred dollars. It was plain robbery, but it was the best that Buck could do.

He glanced back at his ponds with the sets of decoys, then he opened his mouth. *"Quack! Quack! Quack!"* he went.

It is difficult to describe the exact sound, but results were instantly forthcoming. A hen mallard among the decoys answered, and high above a flight of forty mallards looked down and one of the number answered. The flock circled, came lower, and passed over Buck's head with a whistling of wings that stirred his blood. Back they came, set their wings, and alighted. For several moments they floated some distance from the decoys, nervously studying the live and wooden ducks, apprehensively regarding their exact shore surroundings.

Again Buck called to a flight, and again the flock answered, hovered doubtfully, then attracted by the others, alighted. The wild ducks found the food problem solved. Wheat was there in plenty, and a considerable area of the marsh had been planted to duckweed, buckwheat—which is a great mallard weakness—and wapato potatoes. By sundown the ponds were black.

"That ought to satisfy even John P. Standifer," Old Buck mused, "that is, if he's a sportsman and not a game hog." A sigh of relief escaped his lips. "Well, Buck, old sox, you ought to make a living here so long as you can breathe. This year will put you in the clear."

The season opened at sunrise and the cabin was astir. "Listen," whispered Buck Winslow. *"Quack! Quack! Quack!"*

"It's going to be a great day," some one predicted.

The hunters hurried through a breakfast of ham and eggs. The air was heavy with tobacco smoke, coffee and good cheer. Standifer vanished toward one of the blinds, while the others were still pulling on rubber boots.

"That's old John P.," a hunter remarked, "opening up the season!"

Buck Winslow glanced at the alarm clock on the shelf. It lacked five minutes of sunrise.

Crump! Crump! sounded on the morning air.

"Old John P.'s twelve-gauge," an-

other remarked, "it's got a bark all it's own! That means he's shot two ducks!"

Crump! Crump!

"Two more!"

A minute later it was sunrise and the others were hurrying out! Old Buck Winslow was disappointed in Standifer. Of course, it was a little thing, but he could just as well have waited until the legal moment had arrived. When private gun clubs beat the season and killed more than the limit it was difficult to blame the poachers.

By noon they had the limit. Old Buck Winslow did not count the ducks. Perhaps as game warden he should have done so, but he considered the visitors sportsmen.

They rolled away in their big cars and the place seemed strangely silent afterward. The ponds were deserted, too, except for the decoys. Out in the bay floated thousands of ducks. At dusk they would come in, but this night there would be no evening shoot—the crowd had already got the limit.

The following afternoon Standifer appeared. "Thought I might have missed a couple," he suggested, as he took his place in a blind. Buck hastily set the decoys. To himself he was observing that few clubs will stand more than twice-a-week shooting. He was wondering what the other members would say. Standifer's extra shooting would hurt the sport for those who came in the middle of the week. It was none of Buck's business, he decided, as long as he got his money. It would be due on the fourteenth or fifteenth.

Standifer did not show up Wednesday, but he was there Thursday and Friday, appearing late again Saturday night.

"Game hog," growled Winslow, "the ducks are getting wary from so much shooting. One man like him can put a place on the bum. But I'm helpless. He's the man I'm looking to for my money. Wonder if I'd better speak to him about——"

"Winslow!" called Standifer.

Somehow Buck found himself jumping, as other men jumped when the big man spoke. He hated himself for that. He called himself a coward. "You fool," he sneered in self-contempt, "you've always been independent. "That's what comes of getting old! A man's afraid of his job, or of losing his little savings." He hurried on to Standifer.

"I think," Standifer remarked, "the Duke boys are shooting after the time limit. "Listen!"

The sound came faintly. *Crump! Crump!*

Winslow thrust a gun into his pocket and struck off across the fields. When he reached the spot where the shots had come from he found only a single figure crouching in the brush.

"Who are you?" he asked.

"Joe Duke," the youth answered sullenly. "I haven't been shooting. I haven't even got a gun," he muttered.

"You tell those brothers of yours, then, there's a new warden for this district. Anybody shooting before or after time will be arrested. Anybody shooting more than the limit will get it, too."

"Yeah," jeered the youth, "everybody but the rich guys over at the club!"

"They'll get it, too," Winslow retorted, "but you won't find them breaking the law." He legged it back to the cabin. The run had tired him. He wondered if he would be as firm with the club members, if the occasion should arise, as he was with young Duke. "If I'm not, it's because I'm afraid—yellow!" he decided.

Another Saturday afternoon. The cabin was filled with men and dogs and the game odor of hunting coats. Standifer fished out a check. "Prob'ly won't see you Tuesday, Winslow," the

man said, "so here's the check, dated ahead. I've collected from the rest of the boys."

Buck Winslow glanced at the check. It was signed by Standifer and was for three thousand dollars. "I can pay off old Shylock," he thought, "and have some left. At last I'm in the clear!" He hurried out to set the decoys. The evening flight would soon be on.

The men had hardly taken their places before a flock of twelve mallards came toward the blind. Standifer got two; three more dropped and the others broke formation and soared back toward the bay.

As the sun slipped below the horizon, Standifer muttered, "What's the matter with the ducks?" Stragglers came in for the next half hour. "Quittin' time," one of the hunters remarked. "Here comes Old Buck for the decoys."

As the men left the blinds, a great flock passed low, hovered a moment, then splashed into the pond.

"Look at that," Standifer cried angrily, "coming in right when he's lifting the decoys! There's another flock, and another! They're wise, those birds. They know when to come in. For two cents I'd go back and—— We feeding them and they holding back until it's dark!" In his anger, he kicked one of his spaniels aside and stalked into the cabin. The half-dozen ducks he had shot during the afternoon he hurled into the nearest corner.

Buck Winslow could have answered the question, "What's the matter with the ducks?" The answer would be: "Standifer's shooting them so often they don't have a chance to forget."

Shortly before shooting time the following morning the ducks headed for the bay after a night of eating in the marsh. All day they rode on the placid surface, except for an occasional straggler that decoyed to the ponds. Sensing dissatisfaction, Buck Winslow was moved to tell the other men the cause, but he held his tongue. All his life he had followed a certain code. "Telling," was against that code, which also called for square-dealing for all.

He cooked the noon meal and was in the midst of preparing supper when the sun slipped behind the horizon. He looked at the clock, then onto the bay. The thousands of ducks had not moved yet, but scattered members were becoming restless. They would fly a short distance and settle again. In the distance, the shots of other clubs could be heard. Then. *Crump! Crump! Crump!* The shots came from beyond the ponds.

Standifer rushed in. "Buck," he snarled, "what's that game warden's badge on you for? That Duke gang's on your property!" He jerked his thumb toward the sound. "They scared up a flock setting its wings for the ponds."

"They're on their own side of the fence. I'll walk down to see they don't get over. Only two minutes shootin' left, anyway."

It was thirty-five minutes after sundown that Buck heard wings whistle overhead. Standifer lifted his gun. "Don't do it!" Buck warned. "Time's up!"

The formation vanished into the slate sky as Standifer hesitated. "What do you suppose I'm digging up good money for? I'm entitled to my birds!" His complaint was interrupted by livid flashes stabbing the air on the other side of the fence.

Buck heard a heavy splash. The Duke boys could shoot! Buck broke into a run, his boots clumping heavily heralding his approach. Three young men stood around with guns in the crooks of their arms; a fourth was just picking up a mallard drake. In this man's face there was the same cold determination as in Standifer's. They were the same type, but lived different lives. The youth was defiant, but he waited for Buck Winslow to speak.

"Guess you'll have to come along, son," Buck said calmly.

"With who?"

"With me!" Buck had grown tense now.

"You and who else?"

"If one young Texas Ranger could settle a riot," Buck said easily, "I guess one old Texas Ranger, retired, can handle four kids. I know you're bad, and all that, but all my life I've dealt with bad men." He jerked his thumb. "Come along, Jud Duke!"

To the surprise of the four, particularly Jud, the latter obeyed.

"I warned you I'd arrest anybody breaking the game laws in my district!" said Winslow.

Jud sneered. "I suppose you'd arrest John P. Standifer if he broke the laws? Yes, you would!"

"John P. hasn't broken the laws, and he's not going to, but if he does——"

Crump! Crump!

For a moment it was deathly silent, then Jud Duke grinned. "Well, somebody's shooting after time!"

Buck Winslow led the run up the hill to the clubhouse. Most of the hunters were inside, but two remained at the ponds.

"Who fired?" Buck demanded.

Standifer straightened up, a duck in his hand. "I did, why?"

"You know why. You're——" Buck hesitated. He could feel the three-thousand-dollar check against his chest. It was crisp paper of fine quality and crinkled like money. He could not afford to antagonize this man. Buck hated himself for hesitating, then advanced a step. "You're under arrest for illegal shooting!"

Standifer tried to freeze him with a glare. "Don't be foolish, Winslow. It's our money that's feeding these ducks. We're entitled to the birds, and we're going to get them. I fooled that last flock that waited to come in and I'll fool the next."

Standifer's companion stepped close to Buck. "Listen, Buck," he whispered, "you can't afford trouble with old Stan. Nobody can. He can bust 'em too easy. Nobody would think of arresting him for a little extra shooting. It don't really make any difference, you know."

"It's this difference," Winslow growled. "I can't expect to keep the Dukes or anybody else within the law if the gun club members don't obey it. Come along, Standifer. I've just arrested Jud Duke for the same thing."

"I'm not coming. I refuse to be arrested!" He swung his shotgun around, and Winslow, not expecting such a move from a man of his standing, was caught off guard. "Now get out! We'll run this club the rest of the season without you."

There was a movement at Buck's side. Jud Duke had whipped out Buck's own gun. "Drop that gun, Standifer, and put 'em up," he cried. Keep your back to me, too, or I'll let you have it!"

The gun went to Standifer's shoulder, but he did not swing around toward Jud Duke. Instead, he pumped five shots into the mallard decoys on the pond. "I've got my limit now," he shouted, "and a couple over; but don't get excited, you can't arrest me for that, too! I killed domestic, not game birds."

"You—you——" Winslow spoke hoarsely. "That's your breed, yes, and your measure—tame ducks with strings tied to their legs and anchored."

Jud Duke looked curiously at Buck. "Watch out for his pardner," he warned. "He's moving around in the dark. They don't intend to let this baby be arrested. Make me a deputy for five minutes."

Winslow made Duke a deputy game warden on the spot. Action commenced immediately. Jud dived at Standifer, twisted his arms, and secured his wrists. "I'd like to sap you one for luck," he said gleefully. "What next, Winslow?"

"Might as well take him over to Judge

Holland. He said he'd get up day or night to try a game hog."

"I insist I have a chance to get in touch with my attorney," Standifer protested.

"The judge will appoint an attorney," Winslow snapped, "and you can take an appeal from his decisions if you want to."

"Too many rich guys like you, howl 'Frame up!' then let their cases drag along until the public forgets," Jud observed. "Winslow, I've got a buckboard and a pair of horses tied down the road a ways. There's room for all of us."

It was an hour later that Judge Holland opened court. He accepted Jud Duke's plea of guilty and fined him one hundred dollars. "It's worth it," Jud grinned. "We Dukes aren't poachers and outlaws—only when the gun clubs are getting the game and busting the laws wide open. Then we're all that they say we are—we've got to be to get a break ourselves."

"Next case," said the judge, without comment on Jud's remarks.

"Not guilty, your honor," snapped Standifer. "I suppose you know who I am."

"Yes! John P. Standifer, capitalist. What's that? Can't wait for your attorney to get here. I'll appoint one."

"Never mind. I'm a better lawyer than any this hick place can produce."

In five minutes the evidence was submitted and judgment pronounced. "A hundred-dollar fine," said Holland.

"I'm willing to pay the fine, your honor, but can't this be kept from the record? You can forget to enter——"

"And another hundred dollars for contempt of court," added the judge.

Standifer wrote out a check for two hundred dollars and left the room. He waited for Winslow outside.

"Well, you miserable fool," he snarled, "you may know all about game and birds, but you don't know men or you wouldn't have pulled a stunt like this. Tossed away your big chance." With this statement, which Winslow accepted as a threat and warning, Standifer hurried to the curb, where a friend waited with his car.

Buck Winslow was alone until Jud Duke drove up. "I'll take you back," he offered. "Gosh, Winslow, that hundred dollars was a stiff jolt for me! I work like the deuce for my money. But it's worth it to know we've got a real game warden in these parts. Trouble is, you won't last long. Standifer will see to that."

"I suppose so, but he'll have to obey the law on my place," said Buck stoutly. His place! It was not his until the note was paid off. He thought of the check. Standifer might stop payment. He would have to block that. "I'm not going back, Duke, I'm hitting for the city. When the bank opens in the morning I'll be there with bells!" He grinned. "Have to work fast, you know. I'll be on the job again in a few days."

The paying teller glanced at the check, then consulted a note. "Payment was ordered stopped on this," he said curtly. Winslow gave no outward evidence of the blow. "Why?" he inquired.

"Mr. Standifer states the proposition is not as represented."

"The proposition was exactly as represented," Winslow retorted, "and that's why he's backing down—the yellow dog!" The clerk gasped. This was sacrilege.

"It's well Mr. Standifer did not hear that."

"He knows it, even if he won't admit it," snorted Winslow as he stalked out.

Then things happened rapidly. When Buck arrived at the cabin Shylock was demanding his money. "It's a demand note," he explanied.

"You said I could have three months and——"

"I'm demanding. The proposition is

shaky. Standifer has pulled out and I must protect myself."

"Give me time. The others will stick," the old man pleaded. Then he stopped. He had not reached the point where he must plead with such men as this. He turned and walked into the cabin.

Noon brought John P. Standifer and the sheriff. "I've paid off the note and am taking possession as the mortgage provided," he announced. "Also, your commission as game warden is revoked. You have twenty-four hours to get off the place."

Buck Winslow was in fighting trim now. "So you want to scrap it out, eh? I guess I can arrange that. This is your round. I expect to take the next."

But when Standifer and the sheriff were gone he dropped weakly into a chair and looked about the rude structure he had expected to call home as long as he lived. His entire savings were invested in it. "And no man except Buck Winslow would bet on me getting back what I've put in," he said to himself. He looked at the cabin and muttered, "Standifer's!" Then he looked at the ponds, the marsh and the grounds. Each time he muttered, "Standifer's." He smiled grimly as he looked out at the flocks of ducks blackening the bay. *"They're* not Standifer's!" Suddenly he sprang into action. "Now to fight him! I'll call the Dukes. They'll help."

When night had fallen the stock of grain and food had been removed. This was not included in the mortgage, he remembered. The Dukes slashed a roadway through the thick brush to a lake a mile from the old cabin. Here and there they dropped logs in the muck to keep their loaded wagons from going too deep. When they had gone they left behind grain, grub, and the silence of a lake deep in the forest. But they took with them a deep sense of satisfaction.

A hen mallard, wise in the ways of men and their guns, swung high above Standifer's gun club. Standifer watched her. "Too high!" he exclaimed. "Well, don't worry, boys! We'll have this place fed up in a few days and it's costing us less than we figured. Wonder what became of old Winslow. Realized he was up against a tough game and cleared out, I suppose."

The mallard soared on. She saw the lake, a jewel of blue in a green setting. It was off the flightway of ducks and geese. They usually followed the sounds and bays along these parts. From far below there floated a *"Quack! Quack! Quack!"*

She looked down and saw a dozen decoys. She answered, *"Quack! Quack! Quack!"* Her alert eyes saw more than the decoys—there was a brush shack on the ridge and a lone man squatting in the brush. She had seen him before—scattering grain. He seemed to understand ducks—ducks understood him. She swam slowly, pushing a tiny wave from her breast to the wooden decoys. The nervousness incident to new surroundings gradually left her. She began eating the wheat so temptingly scattered. Presently she left. Buck Winslow smiled as he made his way to the brush camp. He knew ducks, and he slept well that night. Dawn of the new day brought the gossip of hundreds of ducks. Buck looked out—the lake was dotted with them. Some were eating, others were preening their feathers; several dozen were investigating a new marsh in which grew wild rice. "Here for the day," Buck observed cheerfully. "Well, they've got nothing on me—I've no other place to go."

"I haven't seen anything of Buck Winslow," a companion remarked to Standifer three weeks later.

"Bumming somewhere. I've forgotten Winslow. What interests me is the ducks. They're a mile high when they pass over. There haven't been a dozen

ducks on the ponds in the last week. I think they're clearing out."

"I don't! There's a defined flight over that timber. I've heard there's a lake back there. Let's take a look to-morrow. There's nothing here."

Noon the next day brought the two men to the lake. They had missed the newly slashed road and the going had been tough. There was a gasp from Cronk, Standifer's companion. "Man! Man!" he whispered. "Just look at that!"

"Mallards! Millions of 'em!"

"Hardly that, but ample."

"We'll say nothing of this, Cronk. I'm going to buy this lake, but first let's pot the bunch swimming toward us."

"Not so fast!" said a voice behind them. They whirled and faced Buck Winslow. A Federal game warden's badge gleamed on his coat. "Every man leaves a record of some sort," he said slowly, "mine happened to be mostly in the Texas Rangers. Such as it was, it was good enough for a Texas congressman who served with me to use his influence to have this lake set aside as a duck refuge. The game warden appointment followed. The next thing was to get the ducks here. There they are! No wild creature is really stupid. If any ever were the species has been extinct thousands of years—such a species could not survive."

Cronk broke the silence that followed "Standifer," he said, "it's not so much Winslow's courage—though he has plenty of that—that caused him to tackle you, as the fact that all men on the frontier are weighed for themselves alone. Wealth doesn't mean much there. Winslow regarded you as a man he felt should be beaten. The rest of us couldn't forget your influence. We've followed you like sheep. Mostly, this has been to our advantage, but this time it has cost us some fine shooting. I guess the next move is up to you."

Standifer flushed sullenly, then slowly a change came over him. "I've always boasted that if I was ever licked I'd admit it. It's the old story of mixing in another fellow's game. Winslow knew ducks better than I did. Well, I'm licked. What are your terms, Winslow?"

What a story that would make for the newspapers! Standifer asking this old man for terms! But Buck would never tell the story. He had played the game, as usual, without favorites. The retaining of his self-respect was sufficient victory for him. "Terms?" he said. "What do you mean?"

"We want you to bring the ducks back," Standifer said.

"I'll do that, if you'll agree to another proposition. What with game hogs, draining swamps, and the making of lakes where marshes once stood, the ducks have been having a tough time. The boys who enjoy the sport should make things easy for the ducks. If you'll spend money that you won't miss much, we can start right here. I want grain enough to feed the several hundred pairs of mallards I plan to trap. I'm going to clip their wings so they'll nest next spring in that marsh. And I'm going to spend the winter trapping their natural enemies so that every pair will raise a full brood. And then next fall——"

"There'll be real shooting," Standifer interrupted. "You'd better drive back to the city with me to-night. We'll fix that check up and to-morrow noon we'll have lunch with the other boys and work out the details."

Out on the lake the mallards gossiped among themselves.

WESTERN WOODS

(ASPEN)

By D. C. HUBBARD

ONE of the popular metaphors of all time is the one, "to tremble like an aspen leaf." There is a real foundation for this expression, since the small, light-green leaves of the aspen turn and quiver at the lightest breeze so that, if in no other way, this tree may be easily distinguished.

The slowest-growing trees are usually the longest lived, and this is so with the rapidly growing aspen whose average life is but between seventy and eighty years.

Other names by which this tree is known are, quaking aspen, popple, poplar, trembling poplar, and American poplar. Also, in the West it is known as the golden or mountain aspen, and in the East as American aspen and white poplar.

Throughout the Northern part of the United States and in parts of Alaska and Canada the aspen grows, extending Southward from Maine to Tennessee in the East; throughout Washington, Oregon, and extending south to the mountain ranges in the West. Generally, the trees reach forty feet in height and ten inches in diameter, although this size increases in favorable locations. For more than half of their length the trunks are straight, smooth, and of uniform diameter. The aspen must have a great deal of sun, and where other trees provide too much shade it dies.

Aspen sprouts easily, reproducing from seed and from root sprouts. In the West, it is almost entirely free from root sprouts. In the East, the wind spreads the seeds, of which there are an abundant outdrop, and in burned-over area and fields the aspen shoots up easily.

A near relative of the aspen is the large-tooth aspen, but its range is limited. From Nova Scotia to Minnesota, southward to Delaware, and in the Appalachian Mountains it appears. The two varieties are cut and used without distinction. Other names for the large-tooth are, large poplar, and large American aspen.

Together with the cottonwoods and balsam poplars, the aspens are termed "cottonwood," in lumber production statistics. It is said that fifteen per cent of the lumber listed as "cottonwood" is made up of the two aspens.

More aspen is used for pulpwood than for lumber. Much of it is also used for excelsior. When it comes in contact with the soil it decays easily. The wood is usually straight-grained and is easily worked. It seasons rapidly, but is apt to warp and check. Because aspen is easily pulped and bleached, it is widely used in paper making. In order to make a strong paper, its short fibers are mixed with wood of longer fiber to give it the desired strength. Because of its light color and lack of taste or odor, aspen lumber is made principally into small boxes for shipping foodstuffs. It is also of some value in cooperage stock, being made into jelly buckets, lard pails, and sugar buckets. A small percentage of logs are cut into veneer and made into matches.

It is quite probable that the magazine you are now reading is made from the wood of the aspen.

Who'll Get the Water?

By Howard E. Morgan

Author of "The Haunted Ranch," etc.

"TRY t' scald me t' death, eh? You little weasel, I'll wring your neck!"

Bellowing with rage, Bart Risley sprang to his feet. He knocked the tin mug, still half filled with hot stew, from Lance Howe's hand, and struck out swiftly. Howe scrambled nimbly out of reach. Realizing from past experiences that it would be useless to attempt to catch the fleet-footed little man, Risley contented himself with cursing luridly and cleansing his pants leg of the greasy, still-steaming liquid which Howe had inadvertently spilled.

"Of all the useless, human rats I ever met up with—you're it," Risley raved. "Go get that bucket full o' water."

Without a word, Lance Howe obeyed.

And they were partners these two, joint owners of one of the richest prospects in the Cumberland Hills! Always, it was Bart Risley, he of the foghorn voice and the mighty body, who commanded; and Lance Howe, the drab-featured, resistless little man, who obeyed.

Howe was not exactly afraid of Risley, although he was forced to submit to his frequent painful maulings. No, it was not really fear—respect, rather, tempered by a timid sort of hero worship. Risley was Lance Howe's physical god. Bart Risley was everything that Lance Howe was not—a veritable giant of a man, strong as two ordinary men, and handsome in a rough-hewn, brutelike sort of way. Lance Howe was a little man—although by no means a weakling—and was decidedly unattractive to look upon.

There had been a time when Risley had respected his partner's superior intelligence. But, in face of the little man's abject servility, this vague respect had diminished until it was no longer apparent. Bart Risley had come to hate and despise Lance Howe. Long since he would have severed the partnership.

between them had it been within his power to do so. But Howe had drawn up the written contract under which they worked and the little man had worded this in such a way that the partnership could be dissolved only by mutual agreement. To date, Howe had stubbornly refused to consent to the dissolution of the partnership.

His ugly temper whetted by Howe's uncomplaining attitude, Risley spent much of his time puzzling out ways and means of making the little man's life miserable. Living as they did alone in the wilderness for six months out of each year, any number of opportunities for doing so presented themselves. Risley's latest meanness had taken a new and original form. They had wintered at their claim this year. Six weeks since they should have started south with the goodly supply of dust which their combined efforts had claimed from the frozen earth. Supplies were low; their ammunition was almost exhausted. Risley fully appreciated the foolhardiness of delaying, as did Howe. However, realizing that the procrastination worried the little man, Risley had stubbornly refused to start. The snow had gone earlier than usual this year. Now, the ground was practically bare and it would be necesary to pack the hundred pounds or so of dust on their backs. The last of the ammunition for their rifles was gone. Howe carried a small automatic pistol for which there was a handful of cartridges. That was all. Their supply of food was practically exhausted. Game was scarce. The nearest human habitation was one hundred miles distant.

Over and above his own discomfiture at their predicament, however, Risley experienced an unholy satisfaction in the evident hopeless misery of his companion. For the past week there had been insufficient food. Although himself suffering from lack of nourishment, Risley's discomfort was considerably lessened by sight of his partner's suffering.

The time soon came, however, when the inevitable came to pass. One gray morning at dawn Risley shouldered a heavy pack containing the dust and, without a word to prepare Howe for his intentions, started away. It took the little man the better part of an hour to set the camp to rights and collect the necessary odds and ends of duffel necessary for the trip. Risley carried his blankets and the gold; Howe knew that it was up to him to pack the rest.

The little man soon discovered that Risley, with an hour's start, was traveling at a rapid pace. Uncomplaining, Howe hurried on. He was a skilled woodsman and experienced little difficulty in following Risley's evident trail. At best, however, it was not easy for him to keep pace with the big man; now, carrying a pack proportionately much heavier than Risley's, and, in his weakened condition, the task was a heartbreaking one.

Silently, doggedly, Howe held to the trail. He did not come up with Risley until night. He found the big man sitting on a fallen tree puffing serenely on his pipe. Crossing the tip of a muskeg-dotted swamp, the little man stumbled and fell. Risley laughed then, loudly, slapping his huge hands on his sides and roaring with mirth. Lance Howe made no sign that he had heard. Being camp maker and cook by Risley's edict, the little man eased the heavy pack from his sore shoulders and started wearily making camp for the night.

So it went for three days. Morning of the fourth day found the last scrap of their food gone. But this was not the worst of it. In some unknown manner they had got off their course. For over a week the sky had been overcast with lead-gray clouds. The sun had not appeared for days. Neither man carried a compass. Howe, if left to his own devices, would have held to their

course without difficulty; but, trusting as usual to Risley's guidance, he had blindly followed the big man in a vast circle which at the end of the three days brought them out less than a dozen miles from their winter camp, the point they had started from. In all their three days' tramping, the frozen tundra had yielded not so much as a single snowshoe rabbit in the way of game. For the first time Bart Risley became seriously concerned for his own welfare. He even went so far as to listen respectfully to Howe's suggestions.

"We missed the pass that first day," the little man explained. "You took straight across the valley. Should have followed the ridge, like we've always done. T'other end of the ridge comes out right nigh the pass."

Risley nodded. Next day they followed the ridge as Howe had suggested. Midday brought them to the pass, and, from that point on there was little chance of missing the southern route.

It was still close to one hundred miles to Norden, the nearest settlement; their food was gone; there was no game, and, even if there had been, Lance Howe's little .32-caliber pistol constituted their only chance of procuring meat. But Lance Howe was a skilled performer with that little gun. It was this skill that alone saved them from certain death by starvation.

Early next morning the little man awoke, shivering from a hideous nightmare. In that unpleasant dream, Lance Howe had fought for his life with Bart Risley. Just as Risley's strong fingers had become locked about his throat in a death grip, the little man had awakened.

The moment his eyes opened, however, Howe forgot the unpleasant dream, and his attention became focused, to the exclusion of all else, on his clamoring hunger. Without moving, he searched the gray shadows about the camp. Then, a snarling whine sounded, apparently close at hand. Still, Lance Howe did not move. Risley, he noticed, was sleeping soundly.

It was several minutes before the little man discovered the cause of that squalling cry. Then he saw it—a lynx, crouched on a limb not thirty feet away, its gray body merging amazingly with the gray trunk of the big beech tree. A single glance assured Howe that the lynx was half starved; its green eyes seemed to protrude from the skeleton-like face; the outlines of its humped back stood out like irregularly shaped teeth on a saw. Evidently, the ravenous beast, in its great hunger unafraid of man, had visited the camp in search of food.

Lance Howe's slim fingers found the pistol in his belt, and with infinite caution inched it upward under the blanket. The cat seemed to be paying him no attention. From time to time the beast whined dolefully. With the pistol free of the blankets, Howe turned cautiously over on one side, sighted carefully, and fired.

The little bullet struck the lynx just back of one tufted ear. With a single convulsive shudder, accompanied by a spasmodic clutching of its outspread claws, the big cat stumbled earthward—dead before it struck the ground.

The two men feasted that morning. Certain it was that no food had ever tasted better to either of them than that stew, manufactured from the well-nigh fleshless carcass of the lynx. The beast was literally skin and bone. Even so, however, due to Howe's skillful preparation, there should have been enough of the stew to last them for a couple of days. But Bart Risley refused to stint himself. Where there was one lynx there should be more, he told himself. He did not listen to Howe's protests.

But during the next three days the two men discovered no sign of any living thing The stringy, bitter flesh of

the lynx had contained little nourishment. By noon of the first day both men were hungrier, it seemed, than before, the taste of food merely having whetted their appetites.

Curiously enough, perhaps, it was Risley who first began to show signs of weakening. Usually, the big man set his own pace. It was up to Lance Howe to follow as best he could. The big man still pursued this arbitrary method, but by the end of the second day after they had feasted on the lynx, Lance Howe, instead of trailing a quarter of a mile behind Risley, as usual, followed close.

The most uncomfortable period in the progress of starvation comes during the first two or three days. Lance Howe suffered acutely, but he made no protest. Only his thin lips, pressed tight in a firm, white line, testified mutely to his sufferings. Bart Risley, on the other hand, alternately raved and swore; then, wearied by these noisy protests against his fate, he whined like a dog; at times he even sobbed impotently. Lance Howe observed his companion's unrestrained actions with a mild sort of wonder. He had never before seen Bart Risley like this. Was it possible that the big man was yellow? But no, not that. Certainly not that, Howe told himself, with a white-lipped grin. Almost anything but that; just upset, Bart was, that was all. This starvation business was new to Bart. Bothered him, it did. He took it differently that was all. No two men would act alike under these same conditions.

So it was that Lance Howe argued with himself, and became convinced. It just was not possible that Bart Risley could be yellow. During the entire five years of their generally unpleasant partnership, a vague but nevertheless potent sort of hero worship had held Lance Howe enchained, a not unwilling slave, to Bart Risley. Once that golden image was smeared with the taint of cowardice——

Lance Howe had lived all his life in the North. In that vast wilderness land, only the strong and the brave survive. The man who, due to his strength, courage, and resourcefulness, can wrest a living from this frozen land soon finds himself held in favorable regard by friends and enemies alike. Bart Risley was such a one, that is, Lance Howe had always thought so. Himself a little man in this land where big men were the rule rather than the exception, Howe looked upon Bart Risley as the physical embodiment of everything he would like to be. Huge, strong as a moose bull, a terrible fighter, respected by all for his physical prowess, unvaryingly successful in his mining and trapping ventures, Bart Risley, seen through Lance Howe's respectfully envious eyes, represented all that was splendid and desirable. True it was that the big man had never before been faced with a test like this one. But Lance Howe's confidence did not falter. Bart—Bart with his great strength, would pull them both through somehow.

Although silent and unprotesting in his misery, the little man knew that he would be unable to keep going much longer. Despite his noisy protests, Risley was still strong. Although his broad shoulders had begun to slump, he clung to the gold, and had not once suggested caching it. If worst came to worst, Howe told himself—and he confidently expected to give out long before Risley did—Bart would see to it that his old partner was not left behind.

Security in this conviction gave the little man courage and strength.

Two days later, an accident happened. They had spent the better part of one gray morning crossing a muskeg swamp. The distance was little more than half a mile as the crow flies, yet it seemed to Lance Howe that Risley, whose tracks he religiously followed, had traveled a dozen miles.

On the other side of the swamp they

were fronted by a small stream, ice-fringed, but shallow. Through the blue-green ice water, the bed of the stream, carpeted with round, smooth boulders, shone clear. Without a pause in his plodding stride, Bart Risley splashed into the stream and made his way to the opposite shore. With his eyes fixed on Risley's broad back, assured, in his trusting way, that the big man had chosen the best course across the stream, Lance Howe followed without a moment's hesitation.

In midstream, a round, slippery stone slid away from beneath the little man's foot. He struggled wildly to keep upright. The unwieldly pack on his back threw him off balance and he sprawled sidewise, landing with a noisy splash in the water.

Bart Risley did not so much as turn around at sound of the splash. The water was no more than three feet deep, but it was icy cold and Howe was almost instantly chilled to the bone. Not without considerable effort, he finally scrambled to his feet. As his weight settled upon his right foot a stabbing pain shot up through his leg. He cried out involuntarily and quickly shifted his weight to the other foot.

With a shuddering dread settling about his heart, the little man reached tentatively downward to his right foot. Once more that shooting pain! An expression of utter dismay twitched across Lance Howe's white face. His ankle—sprained, maybe broken! He could not walk! Curiously enough, perhaps, as he stood there, perched on one foot, motionless as the gaunt trees on the shore of the little stream, it was not of his own discomforts and misfortunes that Lance Howe thought. It was of Bart Risley. Bart was taking this thing hard, which was too bad. But now, this would make things still harder —for Bart.

The little man's pale eyes flitted with mute appeal toward Risley's broad back. He moistened his dry lips. Finally he called—"Bart!"

The big man gave no sign that he had heard.

Lance Howe called again, a bit louder this time—"Bart!"

Bart Risley stopped, turned slowly about.

"My leg—my ankle—Bart. It's sprained, I guess, or maybe bruk."

Bart Risley's dull eyes took in the situation. His lips formed words, but no sound came. He stamped deliberately upon the ground at his feet.

"Give me a hand, Bart. I—I——"

Bart Risley shoved the heavy pack about to a more comfortable position on his back. He was no longer looking at the shivering little man. His dull eyes followed vacantly along the pebbly beach. Then, abruptly, he turned right about and stumbled away.

Lance Howe could not believe the evidence of his own eyes. "Bart," he called, "ain't you goin' to help me?" And then, as the big man kept purposefully on, "Bart!" he called again. "My Heavens, you ain't goin' to—leave me?"

Bart Risley disappeared behind a clump of willows.

Lance Howe's face was deathly white. His befuddled thoughts groped for understanding. Bart—Bart, his partner —had left him—to die!

But Lance Howe was to the wilderness born. Like the furred and feathered wilderness dwellers, his neighbors, he would fight, as was his nature and theirs, for his life. Even the timid rabbit, when cornered, will fight to the death for its life. Lance Howe did not know the meaning of self-pity.

The injured leg, numbed by the cold, did not hurt when he again rested his weight upon it. Inch by inch, he dragged his way to the shore. There, both legs abruptly gave out. Sprawling, shivering on the frozen ground, he fumblingly removed the pack from his back. Then, crawling on hands and knees, he

collected freshet-flung wood, and, after several vain attempts, built a fire. Risley carried most of the matches, but there were still half a dozen dry ones in his waterproof container.

As soon as feeling came back to his cold fingers, the little man carefully inspected the injured leg. He breathed relievedly when he found that it was apparently only a bad sprain. Already it had begun to swell. Shivering in his wet clothes, he bound the injured limb tightly beneath many turns of stiff babiche thong. This done, he stripped to the skin, and, while boiling water in a tin pan over the fire, dried his clothes.

Some time later, after having drunk quarts of scalding hot water, and dressed once more in warm, dry garments, he began considering ways and means out of his predicament. He sought long and patiently in the near-by thicket until he found a sapling, which, properly trimmed, would serve him as a crude crutch. With this fashioned to his liking, he opened his pack, and spent some time weeding out articles which were not absolutely necessary to the arduous journey before him.

When he finally hobbled away he carried only a single blanket strapped to his back.

He took up Risley's trail at the clump of willows, and followed it. His progress was painfully slow. From time to time he stopped and made various improvements on the crude but trusty crutch.

He saw no sign of Risley that day. Not that he was looking for his erstwhile partner. He was not. As a matter of fact, he could not have told why it was that he followed Risley's tracks. Instinct, habit, perhaps. To most men, the following of that indistinct trail on the frozen ground would have been impossible; but Lance Howe was skilled at sign reading.

The little man's hunger had reached the point where it no longer seriously bothered him. At times his leg hurt him; but with the exception of the first few hours of each day, he moved in a sort of daze. His body was devoid of feeling, seemingly without life. He moved like an automaton, wound and set in motion. Even his brain was lifeless, as was his body. No conscious thought motivated his actions. Such vague impressions as did cross his mental horizon at times, were sketchy and pointless.

He knew, however, when Risley turned aside from the Norden Route toward Moose Notch. There was no settlement at the Notch, but several trappers wintered there, and even though the trappers themselves would long since have journeyed southward with their winter's catch of furs there would be food in their cabins. In a vague sort of way, the little man approved Risley's judgment. It was nearer to Moose Notch by some dozen miles. And there would be food there—food——

It was, however, still some thirty miles, roughly, to the Notch. Lance Howe did not grit his teeth and set his mind upon making his destination. His thoughts were incapable of focusing upon anything.

It was some time later, a day, two days—the little man had long since lost track of the time—when he came upon Bart Risley. The big man lay face down in the moss, hands outstretched, fingers clutching at the ground as though striving to drag his unwilling body upward and onward. Lance Howe was not particularly impressed by finding his old partner thus. It did not occur to him that he had by sheer will power outlasted that strong man, Bart Risley. There was no hate in his heart, that is, he was not aware of it. He squinted with dizzy eyes out across the valley. Over there, just across the alder-clad flats, was Moose Notch. As his vision cleared, he made out the vague outlines of a sturdy cabin, nestling close

against the hill. Bart Risley had quit, within sight of his goal!

For a long minute Lance Howe stood there, motionless as a statue, then he started slowly away. At the end of a dozen paces he stopped and looked back over his shoulder at Bart Risley's recumbent form. Then, hardly realizing what he was doing, he came back. With an effort that taxed his feeble strength to the utmost, he turned the fallen man over. Risley had, he noted disinterestedly, discarded the gold somewhere along the trail; the big man now carried not so much as a blanket. Howe knelt and placed an ear to Risley's heart. That heart was beating, slowly but strongly. Briefly, the little man marveled. Why had Bart quit? It was not conceivable to Lance Howe that a man should quit so long as there was life in his body. And Bart Risley was very much alive. His heart was strong. Once again Lance Howe's muddled thoughts registered the suspicion that Bart Risley was yellow—a coward.

He prodded the big man in the ribs with his crutch. "Bart," he said huskily.

It was as though Risley had been douched with cold water. A convulsive shudder twitched through him. His bloodshot eyes fluttered open. Lance Howe had backed away. He stood ten feet distant, watching.

Risley's dull eyes grew bright with recognition. "Lance." His lips formed the word, but no sound came.

And, in that brief instant, as he met Bart Risley's staring eyes, Lance Howe's suspicions were confirmed. He saw fear in Bart Risley's haggard face, reflected convincingly in those staring eyes, fear—abject, cringing, and even pitiful.

"Lance," the big man breathed huskily. "Don't—don't leave me—— Help—help me, Lance. I'm—I'm all in."

Lance Howe pointed silently across the valley toward that cabin, now outlined clearly in a finger of pale sunlight.

Bart Risley followed the little man's outstretched arm. "Yeah—I know—Lance—but—I—I—couldn't possibly make it."

Lance Howe's eyes hardened. Through that whining confession his suspicions were doubly confirmed. Bart Risley was yellow.

For a minute the little man stood there, something very like a sneer on his face. During that brief instant his heart was hard. Then, a pitying expression replaced the sneer. Slowly, very slowly, he hobbled back and stood at Bart Risley's side.

"Git up!" he commanded.

As though struck with a whip, Bart Risley, groaning, obeyed. At last the big man stood tottering on his feet.

Lance Howe threw an arm about Bart Risley's waist as though this feeble support might serve in some miraculous manner to support the big man. Then, together they stumbled on, falling, rising, falling, but always rising and going on.

It was night when they reached the collection of deserted trappers' cabins across the valley. Bart Risley slumped face down on a bunk alongside the wall. Lance Howe built a fire and prepared food.

Howe recovered quickly from his terrible experience. Risley did not recover so quickly. At the end of ten days, however, the big man had become quite his old self.

Risley had acted differently toward Lance Howe, however. For hours at a stretch he would watch the little man from beneath lowered lids. To all outward appearances Lance Howe was the same timid little man that he had always been. So Bart Risley eventually decided, at any rate.

He discovered his mistake one morning as they were preparing to go back

and get the dust which Risley had insecurely cached. Breakfast was over and dishes were to be washed. Bart Risley lounged in a chair, puffing serenely on his pipe. He pointed toward a tin pail hanging on the wall. "Go get that pail full o' water," he commanded.

Lance Howe paused in the act of lighting his pipe. "Go get it yourself," he said.

For a long minute Bart Risley sat very still, staring wonderingly at his companion's half-averted face. Much to his own surprise he did not fly into the usual fit of rage. Finally, his eyes wavered, ever so slightly.

Lance Howe came and sat on the bunk a few feet away from Risley. With slow deliberation he removed the pipe from his mouth. "I'm through takin' orders from you, Bart," he said evenly. "You're yellow."

Risley's right hand gripped the arm of the chair. Otherwise, he made no sign that he had heard.

"You ain't such a much," the little man continued slowly, "you're big and you're strong, but—you're yellow. From now on you do the work, that's all you're good for. And me—I'm the boss."

Bart Risley's big body slumped noticeably down in the chair. He relighted his cold pipe with fingers that trembled. For a time he puffed rapidly, then he came slowly to his feet and took the tin pail down off the wall.

THE LAST OF THE FOX INDIANS

OUT on a reservation near Tama, Iowa, live the survivors of one of the most interesting tribes of American Indians. Probably never exceeding twelve hundred in number, the tribe of Fox Indians has now dwindled to some three hundred and seventy-five, and of these only the older folk preserve the ancient spirit and customs of the tribe.

Early in America's history, the Fox Indians made their presence felt by attempting to tax the trade route between Louisiana and Canada. This involved them in a fifty-year war with the French, but they broke up that route, and the loss of Canada by the French was due, in part, to their intervention.

Extremely independent by nature, the Fox Indians have rarely intermarried with other peoples, and racial customs and beliefs have been handed down and observed with great regularity and reverence until the present day. Now, however, the younger members of the tribe tend to take the ancient rites less seriously. But some of these traditions are most interesting, and, through the efforts of Doctor Truman Michelson, Smithsonian ethnologist of the Bureau of American Ethnology, who has spent seventeen summers among the Fox Indians, many of them will be recorded.

The Fox ritual ceremonies occur in the spring and fall and are performed to insure such practical ends as the avoidance of disease, success in war, retribution in case ill is said against the chief's village—that is, if the evil words are suspected of being prompted by supernatural spirits.

Although no dancing is done during the winter season, in the summer there is much feasting and dancing of a ritualistic nature. In the summer also comes the ceremony of the eating of dog meat, as well as prayers to the Spirit of Fire and He Who Lies With His Face In The Smoke Hole—which last is a roundabout designation for the sky. These prayers are for the purpose of asking the Fire and the Sky to inform the mythical originator of the festival that the ceremony is in progress.

With His Boots Still On

By Frances Halley

WINTER sifts down from the Bear Lodge,
A blizzard of blinding snow,
In its icy breath a threat of death,
And months of twenty below.

Old "Lone Pete" in his shuttered saloon
Fingers his .45 gun,
Aimin' to end what he couldn't mend,
For the game is over and done.

The old days with their wild ways
Are as dead as his old pard, Bill.
And the West is a nest of dude hunters
Too foolish and pifflin' to kill!

They carry their own flasks with them,
But seldom oblige with a drink;
They handle a gat like a stovepipe hat,
And a war whoop startles 'em pink!

What use o' hangin' out longer?
—Like tryin' to fill to a pair—
His Colt would take him where Bill was waitin'
Dispatched by a ornery bear.

The handle had plenty of notches;
Lone Pete was a tol'able shot.
He'd carve one last crease for his own decease,
He'd not be a hard one to pot!

"Y-e-e-e-o-w!" hurtles out of the darkness,
A hair-raisin' whoop o' war.
Abrupt interruptin' his sepulchral sculptin',
Pete makes one leap for the door.

'Tis "The Wolf" down from Inyan Kara—
Pete knows that outlaw's yowl—
He ramps from his lair in the mountains bare
When it comes his night to howl.

So Pete steps out on the lonely street.
Two pistols bark as one;
And two old rips cash in their chips
The way it oughta be done.

Now winter sifts down from the Bear Lodge,
But Pete, he ain't takin' it ill,
For he went out yon with his boots still on,
So he ain't ashamed t' meet Bill!

Shorty Goes up on Smoke

by Ray Humphreys

Author of "Salt on His Tail," etc.

THE treasurer for the Monte Vista Mid-winter Fun Festival out at the fairgrounds, Max Hill, came bursting into Sheriff Joe Cook's office as if forty fierce Comanches were right on his flying heels. There was no one behind him, however, but Tom Chapin, the old retired city marshal, who had long been acting as a special watchman around the fairgrounds. Chapin was breathless, pop-eyed, panting with excitement. He was quite speechless, but not so Hill.

"Sheriff! Great Cæsar's ghost!" whooped Hill, as Sheriff Cook and his deputy, "Shorty" McKay, leaped to their feet. "Gosh amighty! I've been stuck up! I've been robbed! The dough is gone! Gone, I tell yuh! The dangest, nerviest crook in all kingdom come plopped in—an', an'—sufferin' jack rabbits! Whew! Oh, my—oh, my!"

The sheriff seized Hill by an arm, none too gently.

"Set down in that cheer, an' keep yuhr shirt on!" snapped the sheriff. "Spit out what yuh got to say in plain lingo, leavin' the sufferin' rabbits an' kingdom come outta it. Whar was yuh held up now, Max, an' how?"

"Thunder and lightnin'!" exclaimed Max, wiping his hot forehead with his handkerchief. "I'm settin' in my office, to the fairgrounds, countin' the day's gate receipts. Tom, here, is standin' with his back to the stove. when all o' a sudden the door swings open an' I feels a gush o' cold wind! I never looks up, thinkin' it's one o' the employees, but I hears a scrapin' o' feet an' I glances at Tom to see him divin' behind the stove like a prairie dawg seekin' its boudoir an' then——"

"Plenty o' reason why I did!" said Chapin defensively.

"Waal, an' then I swings around to find myself starin' inter the muzzle o' a gat that looked like that ol' Civil War cannon on the courthouse grounds. Thar's a feller behind that gun with a black mask on his face. I kin see the whites o' his eyes gleamin'

through two holes in the mask! Whew, boy! Yuh know how yuhr stummick feels, sheriff, when yuh go down fast in a elevator in one o' them Denver skyscrapers?"

"Never mind that!" said Sheriff Cook tersely.

"Waal, this gent throws me a canvas sack an' wiggles the gun at me, indicatin' that my dough is to be deposited in his sack! Waal, I don't like that, but what choice has I got, eh? I crams that sack full o' dough, sheriff, while my heart was rappin' on my ribs like a pile driver. I puts it all in—thar was ten twenty-dollar bills, thirty-eight ten-dollar bills, forty-two five-dollar bills, nineteen one-dollar bills, approximately one thousand dollars in currency, an' when I reaches fer the silver money—about three hundred dollars, halves, quarters—he shakes his head that he don't want it. He grabs the bag an'——"

The retired city marshal cut in right there:

"An', sheriff, right at that minnit, as he took the bag, I sings out to him: 'Stranger, drap that gun afore I bore yuh full o' hot lead! Heck, I might as well have spoken to the man in the moon! He don't pay no attention whatever. I has him covered, with my gat pokin' aroun' the stove at him. No, sir! He jus' backs out, cool as yuh please, an'——"

The sheriff swore fluently.

"An' yuh didn't shoot him, Chapin?"

The old marshal changed color and hung his head.

"Waal, I'm sorry, but—yuh see—I was cleanin' the gun a while back—'long in September—an' I plumb fergot—neglected—it kinda skipped my mind—to reload it, an'——"

The sheriff swore again and Chapin cringed.

"Huh! So he got away! When was this?"

"Ten, fifteen minnits ago!" cried Hill. "We run right up here to yuhr office to tell yuh about it. We saw the cooky disappear inter the crowd along the river—the ice boat races is on now, yuh know, an'——"

The sheriff's face lighted.

"Kin yuh pick him out, yuh birds? He kain't get away with no one-thousand-dollar gun robbery in this town! Not while I'm sheriff here! The pore fool! He thought he was purty smart, too, not sayin' a word in that job, eh? Waal, gents, I'll tell yuh what that means—it means we look fer a nervy local feller—that's what! I don't need no book on detectivin' to tell me that! He didn't dare speak, seein' he was scared yuh'd recognize his voice. He's a local man. We'll git him. But he's nervy, disregardin' Chapin's order to put up his hands like he did. Come on, Shorty; yuh, too, Hill and Chapin; we'll land him!"

The deputy sheriff frowned.

"Sheriff, thar's a pile o' strangers in town ter-day fer the fun festival an' winter carnival," said Shorty slowly. "Don't yuh suppose this bird might be a stranger? I figger——"

"Ef yuh figger to waste time arguin' the matter, yuh've lost right now!" answered Sheriff Cook. "Come on. I'm doin' the sleuthin' in this case. It's plain as the snow on Mount Baldy. that bird never dared talk fer fear o' disclosin' hisself."

"Yuh jump at conclusions like a trout jumps at a fly," protested Shorty irately.

"A sucker don't jump at nuthin'," remarked the sheriff. "Come on—come on!"

They went. The four of them—Sheriff Joe Cook leading, with Shorty and Max Hill and Tom Chapin right on his heels, the excited Mr. Hill explaining some more.

"No one knows about the robbery, sheriff!" he gasped. "I don't keer to have it git out, not until we git the

dough back, anyhow! No use in scarin' off the robber, I thinks, when we knows that he is right in the crowd."

"Max, yuh walk up here with me," said the sheriff. "Minnit yuh lamp yuhr man, yuh nudge me. Shorty an' Chapin, yuh be ready to back me up. Yuh two walk along behind us! He won't know yuhr Betsy is empty, Chapin. Minnit Max nudges me, three guns on the bird! No chances, see? An' ef yuh spot the hombre fust, Chapin, yuh nudge me, see? He's a desperate bird—probably a cowhand from one o' the near-by ranches. Yuh sure yuh never seen him afore, Hill? Chapin? Think now—think an'——"

"I don't know," said Hill. "He had a black mask on, I tell yuh! I may have seen his black hat an' his black suit afore, I don't know! I wish I had a gun, too, I'm nervous."

"I'm glad yuh ain't got a gun, then," said the sheriff briskly. Then he added, as if musing aloud, "Black hat, black suit, local man, afraid his voice would be identified—— Huh, gents, that hombre, nervy as he is, is jus' as good as ketched now!"

But it did not turn out that way. Hill didn't nudge the sheriff and three guns didn't snap out to cover some surprised individual. As the quartet tramped back and forth, from the ice races to the skating rink, from the toboggan slides to the tents where the hot dogs and take-a-chance-on-this-or-that boys were operating, without Hill doing any nudging, the sheriff began to get worried. He scowled. He began to swear softly and, finally, swung around angrily.

"Shorty!"

"Yes, sir?" said Shorty, rejoining his companions quickly. "I was jus' borryin' a cigarette offn a gent back thar——"

"Waal, this is no time to be borryin' cigarettes!" snapped the sheriff. "Yuh kindly keep right with us from now on. An', say, Hill, are yuh sure yuh kin pick that hombre?"

Max Hill looked gloomily from side to side.

"I—I—oh, I guess mebbe so!"

"It don't look that way," said the sheriff darkly. "We've wasted twenty or thirty minnits already an' our bird may have gone out the gate by now! Yuh give us a description. What did he look like?"

"Gosh, I never seen his face, sheriff!"

"How tall was he? How much did he weigh? How——"

"Oh," said Hill, "he was about five foot eight, weighin' around one hundred and fifty pounds or so, kinda stocky, black suit——"

Shorty snickered. Such a description would fit eighty per cent of the men in the grounds, no doubt. The sheriff, however, barked out a sharp order:

"Shorty, yuh take Chapin an' start lookin'—yuh two—fer a gent, a local gent, answerin' that description! We got to hurry! Thar's folks headin' fer the gate now. Me an' Hill will go down thar, by the gate, waitin' an' watchin', an' lettin' them as don't look suspicious pass out to avoid a jam an' a lotta explainin'. Yuh an' Chapin circulate through the crowd. We got to get this hombre—an' we gotta nail him inside o' a hour at the very most. Yuh get me, Shorty?"

Shorty started to say something, but the sheriff cut him short:

"Shorty, yuh heard me?"

"Yes, sir!"

"Ef yuh see a man answerin' the description, jus' go frisk him," went on the sheriff. "Yuh kin josh with him, mebbe, but ef he gets gay, yuh kin say yuh is seein' ef he has an illegal bottle on him. Ef yuh find a gat on him, search fer the dough—but do it nice, so no one will get sore."

"What ef I don't know him?" pro-

tested Shorty. "I can't josh with him then—ef he's a stranger."

"I told yuh," roared the sheriff, "that this cooky is a local bird! What's a clew good fer ef yuh don't use it? Thar's a million strangers here ter-day. We couldn't look them all over in a week, an' besides, we kain't afford to insult no visitors! An' it ain't a stranger. A man scared to speak a word or——"

The search, however, was still disappointing. The sheriff and Hill, stationing themselves by the gate, found they had their hands full, investigating suspects who might be the crook. Any local man who answered Hill's description was stopped and pawed over by the red-faced sheriff, who cracked would-be jokes and pretended it was all horseplay. Several individuals grew angry at the unceremonious search. The gatemen, watching the sheriff's antics for a full half hour, decided that the sheriff was a bit off. Finally, after scores of disgusted citizens had exercised their choicest profanity on them, as they passed out following the sheriff's search, the perplexed gatemen beckoned to Hill and asked him what it was all about?

"What is he searchin' fer?" they asked eagerly. "He's sure makin' folks hoppin' mad! Has some one stole a toboggan sled or a bunch o' sleigh bells or something?"

"Say," said Hill angrily, "he'd better find what he's searchin' fer, or yuh an' me is goin' to be sorry!"

The truth was that the sheriff was almost crazy by this time. Somewhere in the fairgrounds, was a Monte Vista man who had one thousand dollars in stolen currency on him. It was a cinch he would still have it, there being no good place to secrete it on the grounds. This hombre had not been found in more than an hour's frantic search. The minutes were slipping past fast. The robber must be found. There was a discouraging number of men who fitted Hill's description, however, and the sheriff, busy pawing this man and that, began to weaken in his hopes.

"I swan, Hill," he groaned, as the searching business slacked a bit for want of victims, "I'm beginnin' to fear that——"

"Ssssh!" hissed Hill, clutching the sheriff's arm. "Looky thar, sheriff! See that hombre comin'—— By the great horn spoon, *he* looks like that robber guy! Sure as Hector!"

"Why, that's Gus Brule from the livery barn," said the sheriff. "I hardly think, Hill, that he could—but we'll soon see."

The sheriff stepped over, halted Brule, and began to run expert hands over him. Brule's eyes widened in astonishment.

"What's the idear?" he asked sullenly.

"Nuthin'," said the sheriff, finding nothing that felt like a six-gun or a wallet or a sack stuffed with one thousand dollars in currency. "Go ahead, Gus. I'll explain things later."

But Gus was in no hurry to move now. He stared at the sheriff with insulting intensity.

"By gosh," he said loudly, "yuh an' yuhr deputy must 'a' sure been celebratin' by lappin' up some Mex tequila! Yuh're both actin' mighty queer! Yuh pawin' everybody over. Mebbe yuh're lookin' fer a cigarette, too—is that it? Yuh want a cigarette?"

"A cigarette?"

"Yes, yuhr deputy is gone bugs on cigarettes," said Gus Brule airily. "I jus' been havin' the time o' my life watchin' his antics back thar near the skatin' pond! He's bummin' cigarettes right an' left, offn every Tom, Dick, an' Harry around. An' he jus' takes one puff offn 'em an' then he tosses 'em away an' shags out an' puts the bee on another bird fer another free

cigarette. Why, that Mexican feller, José Laredo, is havin' a field day follerin' Shorty around, pickin' up the snipes. They ain't really snipes, though, because Shorty takes just one puff an' tosses 'em away an' starts panhandlin' another."

The sheriff's eyes narrowed.

"Hill," he said, "yuh wait here half a minnit, will yuh? I got to go snag that cigarette fiend afore he smokes hisself inter the hospital. The crazy idjut—bummin' smokes an' lettin' the important business go to blazes! Hill, yuh kinda delay any one yuh think—yuh know what—until I gits back."

Hill nodded.

"All right, sheriff!"

The sheriff darted off. Gus Brule looked after him in awe. Then Gus looked at the white-faced Max Hill, and as Max kept watching the passing throng, Gus made a loud remark.

"Goofy—all three!" he pronounced, and marched on.

The sheriff wanted to sneak up on Shorty and catch him red-handed, "bumming" a cigarette. That wasn't difficult. The sheriff spotted old Tom Chapin, the retired city marshal, standing near a hot-dog stand with a woebegone expression on his anxious face. The sheriff approached Tom and tapped him on the shoulder, and Tom almost jumped out of his skin.

"Gee, yuh scared me, sheriff!" he gasped.

"Whar's Shorty?"

"Thar," said Chapin sadly, pointing to a near-by crowd. "I—I was hopin' yuh'd come up, sheriff. I—I'm gettin' kinda worried about—about Shorty. He's been actin' peculiar—mighty peculiar! Askin' fer cigarettes, an' blamed ef he don't toss 'em away no sooner than he gits 'em! Folks have been noticin' him. He shooed me off when I protested. I even went so fur, sheriff, as to go over to the cigar stand an' buy him a package o' cigarettes, but he didn't even thank me! He kept right on bummin' cigarettes—lightin' 'em, takin' one puff, throwin' them away, an' then buttonholin' another man fer a cigarette."

The sheriff had been watching Shorty all the time that old Tom Chapin had been speaking. What Tom had said was true, the sheriff saw. In three minutes Shorty had bummed half a dozen cigarettes from as many men. But he wasn't tossing them away now. He wasn't even lighting them. He was shoving them in his coat pocket, one by one, as he begged them, here and there.

"Looky!" cried Chapin, noticing that. "Yuh've seen squirrels storin' up food fer the winter, ain't yuh, sheriff? Well——"

"Crazy, sure!" agreed the sheriff, and he started for Shorty. No wonder Shorty hadn't found the robber. He wasn't looking for the robber. He was looking for free cigarettes! It took the sheriff about five good long jumps to reach Shorty's vicinity, and he got to his deputy just in time. The deputy was shouting at an inoffensive stranger. He had even gone so far as to lay a hand on the stranger's arm.

"I asks yuh, perlitely fer a cigarette, mister," Shorty was saying. "I asked yuh once, an' this is twice, but——"

"Hey!" sung out the dismayed sheriff, seizing Shorty. "Yuh've done about enough moochin' o' cigarettes around this place, dang yuhr pesky hide, yuh! Yuh got a pocketful o' cigarettes! Take yuhr hand off that gent's arm afore I knock it off!"

Shorty turned around with a mild protest.

"I'm dyin' fer a smoke," he muttered. "I jus' asked him fer a cigarette, that's all!"

The sheriff's face was scarlet.

"Yuh half-witted galoot," he began, but Shorty had turned to the man again. There was a strange light in

the man's eyes. There was a stranger light in Shorty's eyes, had any one noticed it. The man reached suddenly for his pocket, apparently to get Shorty a cigarette, and with that Shorty brought his right fist up smartly to the man's chin. There was a crack, and the man suddenly fell in a heap. Now, the sheriff literally grappled with Shorty.

"Shorty, fer the love o' mud!" wailed the sheriff. "Yuh has gone cuckoo, sure as sin! What yuh hittin' that inoffensive feller like that fer? Yuh've knocked him cold!"

Shorty struggled, panting, from the sheriff's grasp.

"He—wouldn't lend me a cig!" said Shorty.

"Why, yuh half-baked—— Hey, fellers, everybody—anybody—help me git hold o' Shorty here, he's gone loco!"

The crowd edged in. Shorty, seeing that the sheriff was in deadly earnest, held up a hand.

"Wait a minnit, gents!" he cried. "I was jus' kiddin' about that cigarette business! I didn't knock this cooky cold account o' no cigarette! Wait a minnit!"

Shorty leaned over the prostrate man. With trembling hands, he dived into the man's pockets. He fished out a .45-caliber gun from a shoulder holster. Then came a wad of bills from one pocket, a roll of bills from another, a slug of bills from a third, and, finally, out came a crumpled, black mask. Shorty straightened up, a grin of contentment on his boyish face.

"This man is a robber," he said slowly, "the robber that stuck up Max Hill a while back. Here's Max's dough, I reckon. I figgered this cigarette stunt to git my man, an' I got him! Yuh kin slip the handcuffs on him, sheriff! Lordy, I'm groggy from smokin' cigs, an' I only took a puff off each one I borrowed until time got short an' I quit doin' even that. But I got my man, an', as yuh see, boss, he is a *stranger,* not a local bird."

"But the cigarettes?" stammered the perplexed sheriff.

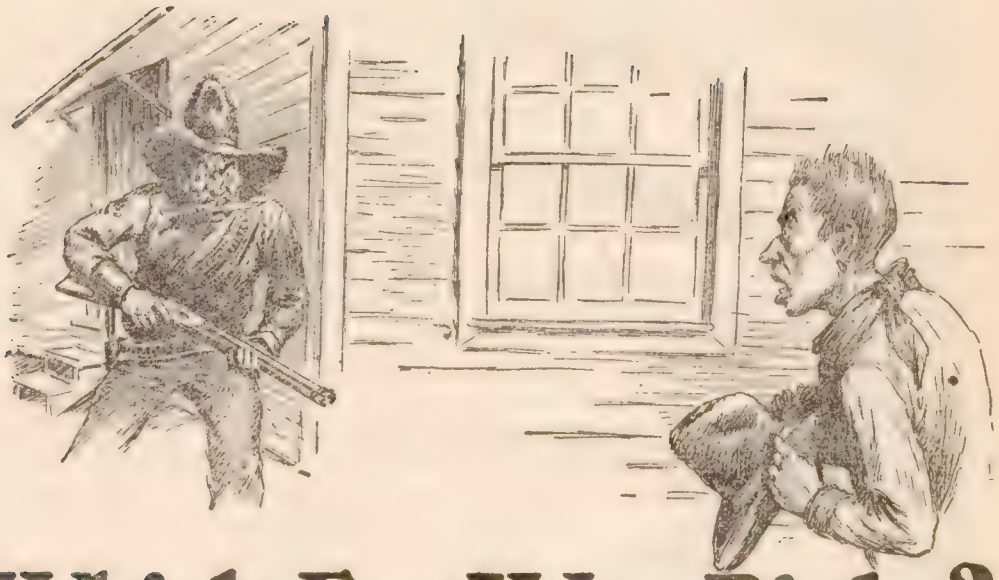
"I figgered all the time that he was a stranger," went on Shorty, "because no local man, however nervy, would have failed to heed Chapin's order to put up his hands ef he knew Chapin had the drap on him. He couldn't know Chapin's gun was unloaded. I got to thinkin' about that, an' why he never said nuthin' durin' the robbery. So I made up my mind the robber was a stranger an', as I couldn't take no risks insultin' strangers by searchin' 'em like we did the local boys, why I simply hit on the cigarette-moochin' idear—see?"

The crowd gaped. The sheriff shook his head.

"No, I don't see yet whar a cigarette ——" he began dubiously.

"Waal, ef a man couldn't hear me ask fer a cigarette, fer instance, or couldn't answer me with words when I got loud with him when he ignored my first request fer a pill," explained Shorty, "he was likely to be the bird I wanted, wasn't he? An' when I sees him goin' fer a gat, it was time I hit him, wasn't it? Yuh see, when yuh played the trout, boss, an' jumped up like a trout at a fly with your conclusion that the robber was a local man because he didn't speak durin' the robbery for fear he'd get his voice identified, I laid low—like the sucker does, as yuh told me. Yuh see, I decided that the robber might be a deaf-an'-dumb man, seein' he didn't hear Chapin's order, an' didn't hear Chapin jumpin' to hide behind the stove, an' didn't say a word to Hill while he was robbin' him—an' I was right. This guy here is deaf an' dumb, pore feller, but he's also a robber."

"Oh," said the sheriff weakly, "I see now!"



Which Eye Was Right?

By Roland Krebs

Author of "The Butt of the Joke," etc.

MOST folks claim it makes them sick to be around people who are in love.

Shucks! I like it. Life on the R Bar R would be kind of a dismal proposition without our two goofy Romeos, "Shrimp" Nolan and "Slim" Evers. To me them two guys are funnier than Weber and Fields.

Seems to me I told you some time back how crazy they acted about Alberta Pritchard, the pretty little schoolteacher over in Snake Hollow. And, didn't I remark at the time that handsome Slim Evers seemed to have a little edge on the Shrimp, although Alberta now and then accepted our Mr. Nolan's attentions, either because she felt sorry for him or else because it gave Slim a little competition?"

Every once in a while the bunk-house boys have got some kind of a laugh out of Shrimp Nolan's attempts to cut Slim out, but we never got a bigger, better, or louder wheeze than the one he handed us recently when he decided to call on science to help Cupid.

The Shrimp decided to turn hypnotist. Honest!

I was the first one to learn about it an' frankly, I thought the little coot was losing what we may generously call his mind. It happened that I had been taking a little snooze in my bunk one afternoon and, when I woke up, I noticed that "Romeo" Nolan and I were the only two fellows in the bunk house.

I was just going to stretch, yawn, and say, "Howdy, Shrimp," when his peculiar goings-on stopped me.

He had his shaving mirror hanging on the wall and he was standing before it, his hands on his hips, staring at his reflection. For a moment I grinned, supposing the Shrimp was just admiring hisself and thinking how much better lookin' he was than his rival, Slim.

After a time, though, I suspected he was up to something else, because people admiring theirselves in a mirror usually cock their head first at one angle and

then at another. Instead of doing this, the little guy just stood perfectly still and stared at himself.

"Say, what ails you?" I finally asked him, propping myself on a elbow.

Shrimp Nolan swung around like if somebody had stabbed him with a bowie knife.

"Oh!" he said, his face getting red. "I didn't know you were there all this time." Then he frowned. "Shucks, Al, you broke the spell."

That was one right on my chin. "Spell? What spell?" I inquired.

"Oh—uh—nothing," he mumbled sheepishly.

"Yes, it is something, too," I argued, keeping my face straight. "What kind of capers were you cutting there in front of that looking-glass?"

The Shrimp acted kind of awkward and embarrassed, but I knew he'd come through in the end, because he always singles me out to confide in on account of I don't devil him like the rest of the boys do.

"Well, I'll explain that," he told me after some hemming and hawing, "but first let me ask you something." He pulled a chair up beside my bunk, sat down, and made a staring face at me. "Do you notice anything unusual in my eyes—the right eye, let's say?"

I looked carefully and finally pulled down his lower eyelid. I couldn't notice nothing out of the ordinary.

"Maybe you just had a eyelash turned backward, Shrimp," I told him. "I don't see anything in it, and it ain't inflamed. If it smarts, why don't you try dropping in a five-per-cent solution of argyrol?"

"Aw, I don't mean that!" he busted out impatiently. "My eyes ain't bothering me. Don't you notice something else—a kind of a glitter?"

That floored me. Naturally, I thought the simp was asking me if he didn't have sparkling eyes, I having always been told that some dames loved men with snapping, brilliant orbs. If the Shrimp's got glittering eyes, why, then, I got gills, fins, wings, and thirty-nine different hips. He's got big, blue, innocent, trusting, dumb eyes—that's what.

"Naw, I don't see any glitter," I snorted, starting to get disgusted. "Do you feel feverish? You certainly are acting delirious."

"Shucks! *I* think they's a glitter there," Shrimp Nolan contradicted me. "I was just noticing it in the mirror when you spoke to me. I was just hypnotizing myself when you upset my—uh—train of thought and broke the spell."

"You were trying to hypnotize yourself?" I busted out.

"Sure," the Shrimp said. "If you got the right kind of a eye you can hypnotize yourself as well as hypnotize other guys. I know what I been talking about, because I been reading up on the subject."

He reached under his bunk and got out a big, thick book. On the cover was printed "Hypnotism Made Simple."

"Ga-ga!" I sniffed. "It's makin' you simple."

"You just don't understand it," the Shrimp argued, turning the pages. "I'll tell you something about it."

At that moment a shadow, which the Shrimp didn't notice because he was gawking into his book intently, fell on the wall and, looking up, I saw that Slim Evers had happened along and was leaning on his elbows in an open window at our Mr. Nolan's back.

I was about to say, "Hi, Slim," when Evers shook his head, put a finger to his lips, and grinned.

Personally, I don't go in much—or at all, really—for eavesdropping, but then I guess Slim found comfort in the old Chinese proverb that all is fair in love or war.

"Now, then," Shrimp Nolan told me, "it says here on page 597 that even a bright object, like a shiny button, can

induce self-hypnosis. That is, by staring at a shiny button or any glittering object, a guy can dump hisself into a lethargy."

"What's a lethargy, professor?" I asked him.

"Why, when you're sort of half asleep you're in a lethargy," he explained.

"Man, you must have stared at a shiny button five minutes after you were born," I laughed. "You've been half asleep all your life."

Slim managed to keep from bustin' out laughing by stuffing his neckerchief into his mouth.

"Listen," the Shrimp told me, ignoring my dirty crack. "A guy with a glittering eye and a ability to concentrate mentally can hypnotize anybody that is a good subject, the books says. First, you get his eye and keep your own trained on hisn. Then you pass your hands repeatedly around his head and draw them toward your own dome and that concentrates his attention.

"First thing you know, all he can see is that glittering eye of yourn and he falls into a lethargy and he gets suspectable—uh—suskeptical—ummm—no—he gets susceptible to mental suggestions."

"Go ahead, Shrimp, I'm eating this up," I said.

"You suggest certain things to the patient, and the suggestions, the book states, seem like realities and he acts on them. You can make him do all kinds of things. Listen. You sit perfectly still and stare me in the eye and I'll prove it to you."

"Don't waste your time, Shrimp," I informed him. "When I was a vaudeville star, I used to occasionally be on the same bill with The Great Davidius—a palooka who had a hypnotism act that was used to close shows. He tried lots of times to hypnotize me, but I'm unhypnotizable. Davidius said so his ownself—just like your book probably will tell you there are some guys nobody can hypnotize."

"Yes, that's true," Shrimp Nolan sighed.

"Well, anyways, what about it?" I pinned him down. "Supposing you have got a glittering eye and you're John M. Hypnosis himself—what of it?"

The Shrimp, before answering, took a careful look around, wanting to be sure we were alone. Slim, in the window, managed to duck below the sill just in time to escape being seen.

"I'm going to use hypnotism on Slim!" the Shrimp announced.

Our Mr. Evers, who was again back in the window, gave me a wonderful demonstration of eye-popping and mouth-opening.

"Use it on Slim?" I gasped. "Why?"

"To queer him with Alberta," the Shrimp told me with an oily grin. "Listen, Al, a party that's been hypnotized seldom if ever remembers anything about it when he comes out of his pipe dream. Don't you see the possibilities there?

"For instance, I got a date to-night to take the school-teacher into town to a movie. Man, I been two weeks getting that date. Hereafter, when Slim gets hisself a date with her, I'm goin' to hypnotize him into breaking the date and telling her he's sending me in his place to keep it for him. Not only that, I can easily hypnotize Slim into doing all sorts of stuff to queer him with Alberta."

"Yeah," I said, "and if you hypnotize him into committing some crime, you'll be *particeps criminis.*"

"What are those *particeps?*"

"It's Italian," I explained, "and means you would be a party to the crime."

"Humpff!" Shrimp Nolan sneered. "That stuff about folks being made to commit crimes while in a hypnosis is the blah. All the better hypnotists tell you

that the lethargy don't excite—uh—criminal tendencies."

"Just who have you hypnotized so far, Shrimp?" I inquired.

"Nobody yet," he admitted, making funny passes with his hands, "but there's no question about it. Once you've read the book you can hypnotize anybody. It says so."

I managed to swallow a laugh before it cropped out.

"Dawg-gone, Al," the Shrimp busted out, "I wish you were hypnotizable. I'd just like to practice a little and, incidentally, show you."

"I'm sorry," I laughed. "I'm immune to glittering eyes."

The little clown suddenly slapped his hands together. "I got a idea," he said. "According to the book, 'Hungry' Hosford is a very suspectical subject—and so is Slim, too. I think I'll try it out on Hungry. Then, if it works—and I know it will—I'll put the works on Slim and have a little practice hypnosis." He looked at his watch. "I got plenty of time before I go and call for the schoolteacher."

Slim Evers had heard all he needed to know. He ducked below the window sill and disappeared.

Professor Nolan took another look at his book to get hisself all primed. He practiced making passes with his hands and then bulged out his glittering eyes like a fellow having fits.

"Watch me make Hungry Hosford jump through the hoop! Call him over, Al, and then I'll work on him."

On the pretext of showing him a new pair of boots I'd bought, I called Hungry over to the bunk-house door. The three of us jawed there a few minutes and then the Shrimp, after peering, said, "Does your left eye bother you, Hungry? It looks kind of red."

"No, seems to be all O. K.," Hungry answered, rubbing the eye.

"Let me look at it again," Shrimp Nolan suggested, moving closer.

He stared into Hungry Hosford's left lamp—and stared and stared. Hungry stared right back at him, kind of surprisedlike at first. Then the Shrimp stealthily brought his hands up and began making passes.

All of a sudden, Hungry shook all over and his jaws trembled like he was having a chill. Then he stiffened, the way I used to stand at attention in the army. The Shrimp began to move his head from side to side, but Hungry's eyes didn't follow him. They stared straight out ahead, reminding me of my Uncle Eustace that used to walk in his sleep.

Then Professor Nolan walked quietly all around his patient, while Hungry just stood there stiff and still.

"Now what have you got to say?" the Shrimp cackled to me, rubbing his hands.

I got to admit I didn't have anything to say.

"Now, Hungry, I want you to pick up that hatchet and that stick of wood and drive the stake in the ground over there near that old fence post," Shrimp Nolan said.

Just like a marionette, Hungry picked up the stick and the hatchet and done what he was told.

"Now, then, I want you to unfasten your shoe laces and take off your shoes," Professor Nolan suggested.

Hungry did that.

"Now go into the bunk house, lie in your bunk, and take a nap," was the next order.

Hungry promptly obeyed.

The Shrimp smiled all over. "Maybe you can't see no glitter in my eye," he told me, all puffed up with importance, "but Hungry did. There's Slim now —— Hi, Slim! C'm' here and look at the swell pair of boots Al just bought."

Through a bunk house window I heard our Mr. Hosford beginning to snore as Slim approached.

"Say, have you seen Hungry?" Slim asked. "I been hunting him for a hour."

"He's inside taking a nap; I wouldn't wake him," Shrimp Nolan answered. "Hey! What's the matter with your left eye, Slim?"

With that he started to go through with the same treatment that he had given Hungry Hosford. Slim, too, chattered his teeth and stiffened up and stared.

"There you are, Al," Professor Nolan bragged. "He's in a—uh—comatose condition already. Now, Slim, I want you to take off your shirt, turn it inside out, and put it on again backwards."

Still staring, Slim pulled off his shirt and hurriedly began turning it inside out.

I was standing with my back to the bunk-house wall. A voice suddenly whispered into my ear, "How did you like the way I got hypnotized?"

When I swung around, I found Hungry Hosford, grinning from ear to ear, peeping out of the window.

"Slim tipped you off?" I whispered.

He nodded.

By that time Slim had his shirt on backwards.

"Slim," the Shrimp spoke up, "I want you to roll over on the ground and play dead dog."

Instead of playing dead dog, Slim began acting like a mad dog.

"Grr-rr-rrrrr!" he growled. Then he yelled, *"Yeee-ow! Oooooo-heeee-yip-yip-yow!"*

With that he jumped up into the air a couple of times and then streaked for the cook shack, where our chuck-spoiler, Wolfgang G. Schaeperkoetter, was just coming out of the door with a dish pan of spuds to be peeled. Slim knocked the pan out of the astonished cook's hands with a terrific push, then upset "The Wolf" on the steps.

Our pewee hypnotist was as speechless as a guy who hasn't been born yet. His stare was the stariest stare he had been able to dig up all that day.

While the cook sat dumb on the steps where he had been upset, Slim crumpled up some newspapers, laid them against one side of the cook shack, put some kindling on them, and touched a match to the heap. After that, yelling like a lunatic, he ran toward the bunk house, while the cook, cursing freely by then, put out the fire with a bucket of water.

"Wh-what ails h-h-him?" the Shrimp mumbled.

"In spite of what that crazy book says," I suggested, "I guess you excited criminal tendencies in him. You ought to be more careful. I remember The Great Davidius always claimed he could hypnotize law-abiding people into committing crime. Looks like you've made a pyromaniac of Slim."

At the moment old "Biffalo Bull," dean of the cow-punchers, happened around a corner of the bunk house and Slim Evers jumped on his back and pulled Biff to the ground. Slim choked him for a minute or two.

"Not only have you made him a pyromaniac, but possibly a murderer, also," I told the little runt.

I guess Biffalo had been tipped off too, because after Slim got off of him he didn't try to get up. He just laid there like he was shot.

Slim's next move was to break a pane in a bunk-house window and climb in like a burglar.

It didn't matter about that glass. It was cracked anyway and a new one had been ordered from town.

The Shrimp was whiter than a sheet, it seemed to me. He was shaky, too. He started to shake for a fare-you-well, though, when all of a sudden he saw Slim, glassy-eyed like a maniac, peering around the corner of the bunk house. Slim stepped into full view, crouching.

Gosh! He had a revolver cartridge belt around his hips and a .45 single-

action in his holster. Over his shoulder was a rifle cartridge belt and in his hands was a repeating carbine. Gripped in his teeth, the way the noble red men used to do it, was a sharp skinning knife. Slim was scowling at his little rival, arson, murder, and mayhem in his face.

"Shrimp, you gave him too much glitter!" I undertoned the boy's-size cowpuncher.

Slim started to creep up on Professor Nolan in panther fashion.

With a sick grunt, the Shrimp turned and panicked toward his pony, saddled and bridled to take him to the school-teacher's house.

Slim Evers opened fire with the revolver, emptying the chambers and making little spurts of dust spring up all around the fleeing Romeo. Then he put a couple of carbine bullets near him.

Shrimp Nolan got aboard his nag and let him have his head. The pony dashed off into the road and down it, away from Alberta's direction.

Slim grabbed the first horse handy and took after, firing his revolver and his carbine after his opposition as he went. The last I saw of them, they were headed into a side road that led to Yellow Dog Hollow.

It was eight thirty p. m., and dark, when Shrimp Nolan came sneaking back to the bunk house. We were laying for him. As he stepped inside, he found Biffalo Bull staring me in the eye and making hypnotic passes with his hands. "Red" Johns was hypnotizing Hungry Hosford. Bill Tell was hypnotizing "Natural" Neely, and Barney Butts was walking around stiff and stary in a fake trance, mumbling, "Let me at him! I want blood!"

"Aw, nuts!" Shrimp growled, throwing hisself into a chair, while we all gave him the horse ha-ha.

"I'm in a fine hole!" he busted out when the laughing died down. "I was to call for the school-teacher at seven forty and now it's eight thirty. Guess I better go over there at once and apologize."

"Don't worry," Biffalo Bull told him. "Slim went for you. Him and the teacher passed by a little while ago on their way to a movie in town. Slim squared it for you. He told the teacher you couldn't go to a moving picture."

"What reason did he give her?" Shrimp asked anxiously.

"He told her you were having trouble with your eyes," Biffalo said, "but he didn't tell her they glittered."

CRICKET CONTROL IN COLORADO

ALL summer, Colorado fought it out on the line with hordes of invading Mormon crickets—and Colorado won, by dusting the enemy with calcium arsenite and checking their onrush with metal fences and traps.

But Colorado is not resting on her laurels. At the end of the summer, when the crickets deposited their eggs, a survey was made of the egg beds so that an early attack can be made next year upon the new crop of insects, before they migrate. Such a survey is practicable through the fact that the Mormon cricket always lives in great colonies. This gregariousness is just what makes these insects such a pest to farmers, for they travel in great hordes and it is almost impossible to tell where or when the migrations will occur.

Last summer, due to constant scouting, speedy rendering of aid to embattled farmers, and unwearying aggressive warfare, the insect hordes were held in check, and almost perfect crop protection was assured the farmers. But this year Colorado is working on the principle that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.

The Round-Up

BOYS, what's gettin' inter the gals? Or have we been wrong in thinkin' all these years that the female of the species was the kind and gentle member of the human family, and the male, nothin' but a big hulkin' brute?

The above ruminatin', reflectin', and questionin' remarks are called forth from your humble old boss by the arrival here this evenin' of Miss Connie MacKenzie, who reposes her lovely bein' at Lalapanzi, Southern Rhodesia, South Africa. Miss Connie has come all the way, not to address us, but to talk to Miss Spanish Bit and Miss Mexico. This not bein' possible, them two ladies always havin' hidden behind a bush, out there in the dark, when havin' their say as to their method of handlin' horses, Miss Connie will have to slip into the saddle here, and, raisin' her voice, shout her remarks so that we all, includin' Miss Spanish Bit and Miss Mexico, can hear them.

Miss Connie, the saddle's yours:

"MISS SPANISH BIT: I was very much interested in what you've had to say here in the Round-up, and also in what Miss Mexico said. I am only a girl, and although I have ridden since I was a child, I don't know much about bits in any other part of the world, except here. I have an Arabian bit, which is something like a Mexican ring bit, that I can manage a horse with. What is a spade bit like, and how does it act? I suppose it is severe? Miss Mexico says she rides her horse against the severest spade bit she can get. Does it cut the horse's mouth at times? Can ordinary horses stand it, or does it make them rear? I often make my horse's mouth bleed, if he plays the fool. But that does not worry me. He should behave himself. What bit do you use? Do you believe in punishing a horse's mouth, or do you think it makes it callous? I don't think it does. I know that a horse, with a bit in his mouth that hurts him properly, goes well and looks smart, if you keep stinging him with the spur. He then goes well up to his bit, and is lively.

"A good, sharp spur, properly used, is the easiest way to punish a horse. Whipping him is too much like hard work. I hate cruelty to animals, but, as Miss Mexico says, a girl wants to have full control of her horse. A horse bolting on the veldt is very dangerous, on account of the trees, and ant bear and

jackal holes. A girl is only a weak little thing, compared to a horse, and must employ the necessary articles to manage him.

"We have a fine horse. A Mexican. But we can't do anything with him. He either bolts or tries to break your leg against a gatepost, or any other fancy idea that comes into his head. If I use a severe bit he rears, and if an easy one, he bolts. What would be the best way to teach him to behave himself?

"I should love to see you or Miss Mexico teaching him manners. Do write to me and tell me all about your horses, and what kind of bits and spurs you use. It will be so interesting to me out here. I know you don't believe in coddling horses. Most girls who talk about horses don't know mean ones."

Well, well, words fail us. But they don't fail some of the other menfolk. Here, now, is good William L. Chastain, Ibapah, Utah. He's here to say:

"Boss of the Round-up and All Interested: I have been reading Western Story Magazine for several years and like it immensely.

"Now, horsemen and horsewomen, gather around, and let's be sure Miss Arevalo is present. I have been reading the arguments, pro and con, concerning treatment of horses, use of different kinds of bits, etc. At the outset, I wish to say that I speak only and entirely from experience. I live in a horse country, and, man and boy, I have ridden horses since I was able, with considerable effort, to fork one. I have ridden for pleasure and by necessity. I have ridden seventy miles in eight hours. I now own several saddle horses and a couple of racers.

"The foregoing résumé is merely given to add weight to the statement that I agree with Miss Arevalo in but few particulars in regard to horse management.

"I find that the best way to treat a horse is quietly, kindly, but firmly. I think a Spanish bit is an atrocity and should never have been made. Of course, one can be used with no bad results if one is careful, but so many riders will alternately whip or spur their mounts, then jerk them back on their haunches. This kind of treatment will invariably make a so-called 'fool' of any spirited horse. I have seen a horse being ridden with a Spanish spade bit fall while running after cattle and, striking the side of the bit on the ground, force the spade through the tongue.

"It is true that some horses cannot be handled with a snaffle or even with an ordinary straight-bar bit. I have one such animal. For this horse I have a specially made straight-bar bit that is humane and yet by means of which the horse can be handled. Why burden a horse down with a bit, weighing pounds? This goes for the heavy silver-and-gold-mounted bits some riders are so fond of.

"I seldom use spurs. I find they are not needed except with some 'dead-headed' horses or horses that have always been ridden with them. I have some horses I would like to see Miss Arevalo ride with her sharpened spurs. She would certainly need her Spanish bit, and then some.

"Spurs sometimes are handy to cause a horse to move quickly when necessary, in driving horses or cattle. However, I have had several horses that did not know anything about spurs that could make as quick a get-away as any horse ridden with spurs.

"There are numerous wild horses running the ranges here, as well as some ranch horses that have gone wild. Some of these horses still know how to buck. Spurs with the rowels locked are handy to stick into the cinch rigging while riding these or any 'pitching' horse. However, if one can, it is considered better form to ride them 'high, wide, and hand-

some.' Personally, I prefer to 'pull leather' or resort to any other means rather than be thrown.

"A high-spirited horse, properly trained or 'broken,' will be 'up against the bit' without the use of spurs for as long as Miss Arevalo or any other rider cares to ride him, provided he is well fed and taken care of.

"I have a loaded quirt which I always carry when riding, but seldom use. I find it handy to have, when driving cattle, to use on laggards and occasionally to kill a rattlesnake or, upon occasion, to stun a coyote until he can be killed. I also carry, when riding the range, a .32-20-caliber Smith & Wesson gun, or, if you wish, 'gat,' but I do not use it on my horse.

"It seems to me that it would not be a pretty sight to see a young lady out riding for pleasure, swinging a loaded quirt whenever her mount failed to step correctly or displeased her in any way, digging sharpened spurs into her mount's ribs, and then 'sitting down' on him with a severe Spanish bit when he tried to get away from the quirt and spurs.

"Miss Arevalo, would you drive a high-powered car with the accelerator pushed to the floor and then use the brake when wishing to slow down? I don't think so. Then ease up on the spurs and quirt and slack up on the bit.

"Well, Boss, and those who have tolerated me enough to hear me through, I'm afraid that, for a newcomer, I've been very presumptuous with your time, but these horse subjects cannot be disposed of in a few words. Volumes could be, and have been, written, dealing with this subject."

Now, boys, let's wedge in some warbling. All together:

THE DREARY BLACK HILLS.

Kind friends, you must pity my horrible tale;
I am an object of pity, I am looking quite stale;
I gave up my trade of selling Right's Patent Pills
To go hunting gold in the dreary Black Hills.

Don't go away; stay at home if you can;
Stay away from that city, they call it Cheyenne;
For big Walipe or Comanche Bills,
They will lift up your hair on the dreary Black Hills.

The roundhouse in Cheyenne is filled every night
With loafers and bummers of most every plight.
On their backs is no clothes, in their pockets no bills;
Each day they keep starting for the dreary Black Hills.

I got to Cheyenne, no gold could I find;
I thought of the lunch route I'd left far behind.
Through rain, hail, and snow, frozen plumb to the gills;
They call me the orphan of the dreary Black Hills.

Kind friend, to conclude, my advice I'll unfold:
Don't go to the Black Hills a-hunting for gold;
Railroad speculators their pockets you'll fill
By taking a trip to those dreary Black Hills.

Don't go away, stay at home if you can;
Stay away from that city, they call it Cheyenne;
For old Sitting Bull or Comanche Bills,
They will take off your scalp on the dreary Black Hills.

Speaks now another wild-animal hunter, Adolph Travern, 1325 Vine Street, Joliet, Illinois. Turn loose your wolves:

"Boss and Folks: At one of the Round-ups there was one waddy who asked for a male wolf pup. I wonder if any of you could tell me where to write to get one."

Miss Helen Rivers, who conducts this department, will see to it that you will be able to make friends with other readers, though thousands of miles may separate you. It must be understood that Miss Rivers will undertake to exchange letters only between men and men, boys and boys, women and women, girls and girls. Letters will be forwarded direct when correspondents so wish; otherwise they will be answered here. Be sure to inclose forwarding postage when sending letters through The Hollow Tree.

SAN BENITO COUNTY has its ranches. Spread out in the valley of the Santa Clara Range they are, and scattered through the hills of these same mountains of western California. Out from Pinnacles, Tres Pinos, and Hollister, there are ranches. San Benito County has the real ranches of the West.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: As I look at the distant hills of the Santa Clara Range, they appear like huge sand dunes, the scant forest groves like so many patches of tumbleweed. Then my mind roves down the back trail, across the Mojave, through the wooded trails, and over the purple sagebrush range. What a wonderful stamping ground the great West is! Here in San Benito County there are ranches—the real ranches of the West. It is a great place to be, in California, although I'll soon be moving on to Palo Verde, in that wonderful country in northern Arizona. It's a toss-up, folks, between old San Benito County, California, and Maricopa County, Arizona. San Benito has its Pinnacles, Hollister, and Tres Pinos, and Maricopa has its Palo Verde, Wickenburg, and Phoenix.

At Palo Verde I will meet my old pards of the trail—folks who are the ramblers of the West. Do you know that the West has hundreds of thousands of ramblers? We have a floating population of about two hundred thousand on the coast alone. The different counties have set aside certain portions of their forest reserves and parks as free camping grounds. Los Angeles County has a number of them. Some of the cities also provide free camps for the ramblers, and besides that we have hundreds of automobile camps.

Folks, I'll be glad to hear from you-all.

G. B.

Care of The Tree.

Homestead land in Oregon.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: There's some pretty good homestead land in central and eastern Oregon. I've been in Crook County, central Oregon, for the last seven years, and can tell a bit about that section. I suppose you all know the usual procedure of acquiring a homestead. You file on a section and you have to live on it for four years. You build your own home and make your own improvements. No, I'm not an old-time homesteader. Just a twenty-one-year-old Gangster who is looking for some Pen Pals. However, I'll be glad to give out any information that I can regarding Oregon. DEWEY BRYANT.

Corvallis, Oregon.

Sheep and cattle outfits.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: There are a lot of sheep and cattle outfits out in Montana, and

I'm wondering if some good-hearted sheep-herder or cowboy won't write and tell me about the chances of becoming a sheep-herder or cowhand out that way. I'm a hard-working boy of seventeen, and have had a good deal of experience around sheep and cattle. I've been making my own way since the age of twelve, and I'm here to say that I'm able to handle a man's job now.

Cowboys and sheep-herders please come forward with some good advice.

CLIDE LAND.

Box 5, Reeves, Louisiana.

Looking for a pard.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I'm looking for a pard between twenty-one and twenty-five years of age who is planning on going to the West coast, or, if not as far West as the coast, at least out where the West begins. I'd like to have the experience of working my way in that great country of ours. It would be fine if my pard had a car, but I'm willing to hike if we can't make the trip any other way.

Let's hear from you, pards.

W. S. SPEISS.

408 Throop Avenue, Brooklyn, New York.

Argentine, and the Southwest.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I intend going to either South or Central America, and I hope that some of the Gang will come forward with a little information concerning the southwest of South America, especially the Argentine. I'd like to know whether it is necessary to learn the language before venturing down there, and if a hombre can work his way or whether he'd find himself entirely out of luck without a pretty good grubstake.

I'll be awaiting your letters, ramblers.

JOHN MURPHY.

27 Willoughby Street, Brighton, Massachusetts.

Michiganer.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I was born in Michigan and lived there for thirteen years, and then moved to Illinois. Well, folks, Illinois is all right for any one who likes to be crowded. I'm fond of hiking and outdoor sports, but you don't get much fun out of hiking around forty acres of corn and oats! And that's just about all you see in Illinois.

These long winter evenings invite correspondence, folks, so come ahead—Illinois Gangsters included. LOUIS MARCATT.

Route 2, Prairie View, Illinois.

Rangers of the West, please come forward.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I am interested mostly in the mounted police, forest rangers, and the Texas Rangers of the West. It gets mighty lonesome here, and I'm hoping that some of the hombres out there in the West will send a few words in the direction of a little Connecticut farm. ALBERT LACHAPELLE.

Care of W. C. Child, Woodstock, Connecticut.

Every State has its counties and every county has its towns. In every little town there are folks who are waiting to make friends with you. Get a friend-maker Hollow Tree badge and meet new pards wherever you go.

Twenty-five cents in coin or stamps sent to The Hollow Tree Department, Western Story Magazine, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City, will bring you either the pin style or the button for the coat lapel. In ordering, be sure to state which you wish.

Northwestern Wisconsin.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: You've all heard of the famous Brule River, in Douglas County, northwestern Wisconsin, I'm sure. The Brule is where thousands of folks come each year for trout fishing. This little town where I live is Lake Nebagamon, and we're just seven miles from the Brule.

Folks, I've got some snapshots that I have a notion ought to go a-traveling. Do you-all want to see them? This eighteen-year-old Lake Nebagamon Gangster would like to hear from you. RUTH DANIELSON.

Lake Nebagamon, Wisconsin.

Ranch girl.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I'm a girl who hails from Montana, although I now live in central Idaho, on a large hay ranch. I'm what is commonly called a cowgirl, although I do not ride after cattle or break wild broncs. I'd like to hear from some of the real cowgirls of the West. GRACE AYRES.

McCoy Ranch, Goldburg, Idaho.

Looking for a wolf cub.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I've got a request to make. I wonder if any of the Gang can tell me where I can get a wolf cub. If some of the old-time trappers will drop me a line, I'll sure be tickled. All letters will be welcomed, folks—come ahead and see!

CHARLES THOMPSON.

157 Elm Street, St. Thomas, Ontario, Canada.

Hunters, trappers, a mountain lion, if you please!

DEAR MISS RIVERS: This is an appeal to the hunters and trappers of the Gang. I'm looking for a mountain-lion cub, and the old Holla can put me in touch with some of the big-game hunters of the West, I feel sure. Hunters, trappers, I'm depending on you!

VICTOR H. KRANS.

669 Eighth Avenue, Astoria, New York.

Girl of the West.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I'm a Western girl—have lived here all my life. I was born in sunny Arizona, near the great Roosevelt Dam. After wandering through the West and Southwest for some time, I finally came to Washington. I live just about as far northwest, now, as one can get and still be in the States. I'm very near Port Angeles, on the Olympic Peninsula.

I'd be very glad to hear from girls living in Arizona, also New Mexico and Texas. All letters will be welcome. HELEN TARR.

R. R. 3, Sequim, Washington.

New Zealander.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I am a girl of seventeen, and was born and raised in New Zealand. I guess you've heard of our little country, way down in the Pacific. I live in the largest town in New Zealand, and would like some one to write and tell me of your country. I've always been interested in the West.

RUBY FISHER.

Hawera Road, Port Chevalier, Auckland, New Zealand.

Ramblers.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: We've been able to give a helping hand to ramblers, all over the country, and in the future we hope to be of greater service to the hombre who is a rambler. Ramblers may get in touch with other ramblers through the Ace Ramblers' Mail Legion, and especially with those living in Los Angeles, California; Sarasota, Florida; Bridal Veil, Oregon; Kansas City, Missouri; New York City, and Canada.

We're always glad to hear from you, ramblers. CARL W. PULLEN.

Ace Ramblers' Mail Legion, Care of The Tree.

Canada way.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I'm just out a short time from the Emerald Isle, and I have not yet become accustomed to this northern city. I'd like to receive many letters from girls of the Hollow Tree Gang.

MAIMIE MCKENNA.

10171 One Hundred and Fifth Street, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada.

"I'm hundreds of miles away from home, and sometimes I get very lonely. I'd like to hear from some of the girls who are about twenty," says Miss Dixie, Care of The Tree.

"Want to make a heap of pen pals who are interested in hearing about British Columbia. I'll exchange snaps." This twenty-one-year-old Gangster is Betty Latten, Box 25, Westholme, British Columbia, Canada.

"Can I make friends with some of the girls of fifteen or sixteen who live in Arizona, Nevada, or New Mexico?" Mary Watkins, 28 West Market Street, North Long Beach, California, will make a good pen pal for the Western girls of the Gang who are her age.

"I wonder if there are any hombres in the Gang who would like to correspond with a sea-going wireless operator. I would prefer hombres in Colorado, or any part of the West. I could write them from many ports of the world, as I'm always on the go." This Gangster is Milton Dreyfus, care of Radiomarine Corporation, 274 Brannan Street, San Francisco, California.

WHERE TO GO AND HOW TO GET THERE

by John North

It is our aim in this department to be of genuine practical help and service to those who wish to make use of it. Don't hesitate to write to us and give us the opportunity of assisting you to the best of our ability.

Address all communications to John North, care of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

THERE is so much of romance and adventure associated with Alaska that we are not surprised to receive many inquiries about that outpost of civilization. This week we found in the mail bag letters which asked such interesting questions about the Land of Gold that we forthwith voted to make this Alaska Week.

"What information can you give me, Mr. North, about the development of fur farming in Alaska?" asks Dave H., of Spokane, Washington. "You've had a good deal in your department lately about fur farming in Canada, but not a word about this industry in Alaska. I've heard that mink farming is rapidly coming to the fore up in that region and would like some accurate facts on this subject. I'd like also to hear about fox farming. Where would be a good location for such a farm? What varieties of foxes are native to Alaska?"

According to reports from the department of the interior, mink farming is rapidly developing up in Alaska. As Dave probably knows, this little animal produces one of the most popular furs, and while once very generously distributed throughout North America the mink has been growing steadily scarcer of late years. Consequently there is a good market for this fur.

Maybe a few words about the mink would not be out of place here. This fur-bearer is a cousin to the skunk on one side and to the otter on the other. It lives on land and in water and while carniverous will eat either flesh or fish. In Alaska, the chief element of its diet is mighty peculiar, for it is fed upon the flesh of porcupines, which are very plentiful. One thing that adds to the joy of mink farming is that this animal is easy to control in captivity. And since each mother gives birth to five or six young ones in a year, they multiply very rapidly.

Mink farms are becoming plentiful through much of that part of Alaska

adjacent to the government railroad. A typical farm of this kind is that of Garrett Snyder at the village of Wasilla, near Anchorage. This hombre was a section foreman on the Alaska railroad but gave up that position to develop his mink farm. During the past summer he made shipments of mink on which the return was something near ten thousand dollars. This he regards as but a demonstration of the possibilities in this new line of business.

Fox farms are an older industry in Alaska and are scattered up and down the coast and far into the interior. A most advantageous location for a fox farm is on any one of the numerous small islands that fringe the coast of Alaska. On these islands fencing is unnecessary to prevent the animals from escaping, and fish, which is likely to be the chief food for foxes, is easy to procure. There are, however, many fox farms in the interior, some of which can be seen in passing on the Alaska railroad.

Many varieties of foxes are native to Alaska, including the black, blue, white, red, and silver fox, all of which yield very attractive pelts. Foxes grown in the far North have a heavy fur, superior to that of those grown in warmer climates.

As Dave probably realizes, fur farming in Alaska is supplementary to the fur industry based upon the activities of hunters, which has long been highly developed and which yields constantly increasing returns. And it is the hunting up in that region that Jake P., of Albany, New York, is eager to have some facts about. "What about big game hunting in Alaska, Mr. North? Do many sportsmen get up there? What locality would you suggest that a chap try? Is there any place up there that outfits a hunter? Can one procure a guide if it is necessary? What about camps and trails?"

Government reports indicate that travel to Alaska during the past season increased considerably, many sportsmen journeying to that territory for the shooting. It is said that within a radius of one hundred and fifty miles, in the territory back of Anchorage and along the Alaska railroad, there may be found an abundance of caribou, moose, mountain sheep, black bear, and mountain goat. This region issues a challenge to any other that offers such a variety of big game. The Chickaloon District and Kenai Peninsula are also favorite hunting grounds for this big game.

Jake will find that the town of Anchorage on Cook Inlet provides adequately for the entertainment and outfitting of sportsmen. Here, also, guides who are thoroughly familiar with the hunting grounds may be procured. Camps and trails have been provided here and there throughout the great solitudes of this northland. Special side trips may be made to the Kodiak Island and the Alaska Peninsula, where are to be found those huge Kodiak bears which are the largest game animals on the continent. These trips are sometimes made by airplane.

In fact, Alaska is coming to be recognized as second only to Africa in furnishing an opportunity for shooting big game and as having an individuality which makes the pursuit of game in this region quite different from hunting anywhere else in the world.

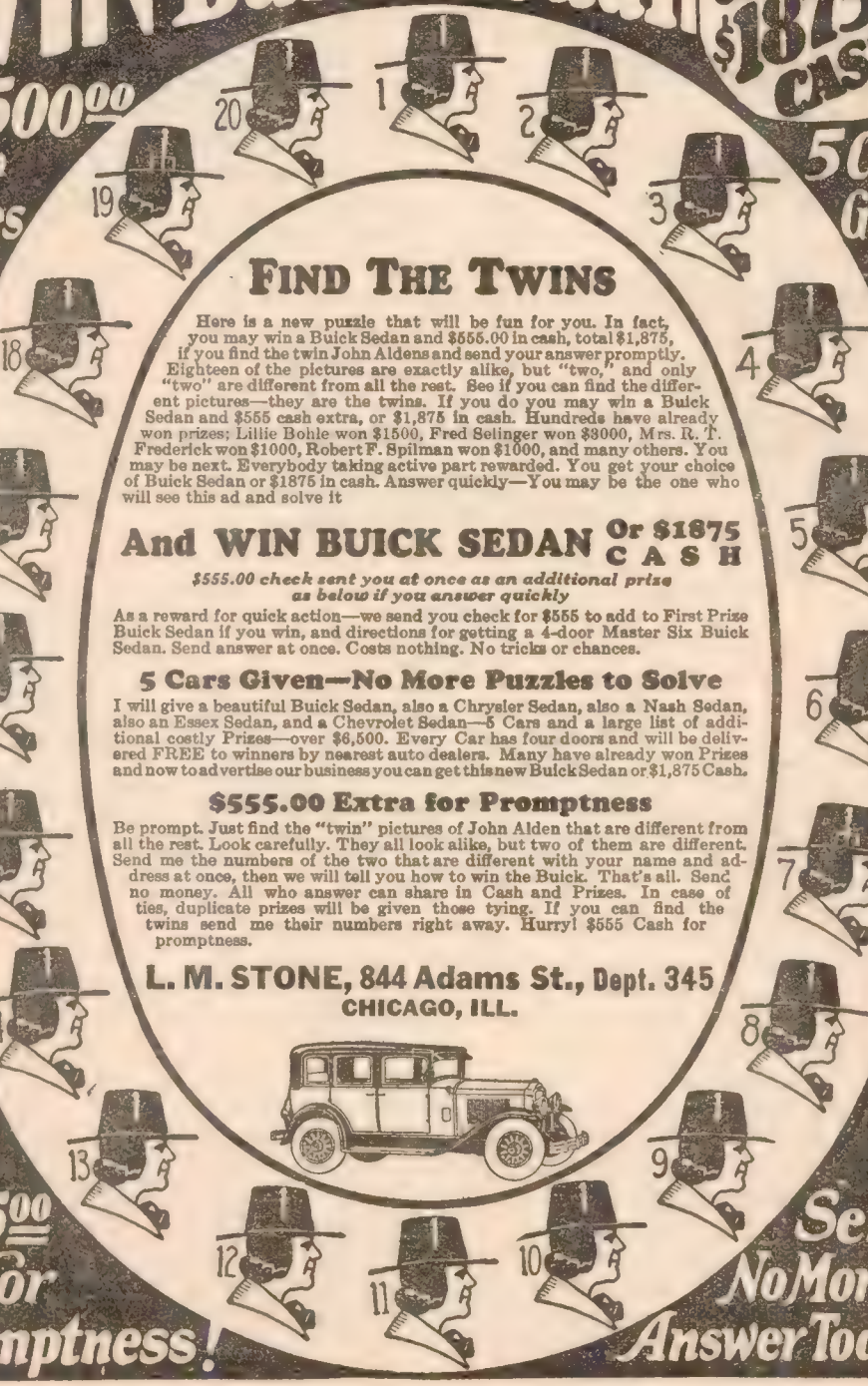
One can't think of Alaska, however, without being reminded of the fact that it was first widely heralded as a land of gold, so the queries of H. K. P., of Atlanta, Georgia, on this topic, seem quite in order. "I'd like some facts on the progress of gold-mining operations in the vicinity of Fairbanks, Alaska, Mr. North," writes this citizen of the Cracker State. "How many dredges are at work there now? How is business in Fairbanks?"

Uncle Sam's reports state that seven dredges are now at work extracting gold

WIN Buick Sedan or $1875.00 CASH!

$6500.00 in Prizes!

5 Cars Given!



FIND THE TWINS

Here is a new puzzle that will be fun for you. In fact, you may win a Buick Sedan and $555.00 in cash, total $1,875, if you find the twin John Aldens and send your answer promptly. Eighteen of the pictures are exactly alike, but "two," and only "two" are different from all the rest. See if you can find the different pictures—they are the twins. If you do you may win a Buick Sedan and $555 cash extra, or $1,875 in cash. Hundreds have already won prizes; Lillie Bohle won $1500, Fred Selinger won $8000, Mrs. R. T. Frederick won $1000, Robert F. Spilman won $1000, and many others. You may be next. Everybody taking active part rewarded. You get your choice of Buick Sedan or $1875 in cash. Answer quickly—You may be the one who will see this ad and solve it

And WIN BUICK SEDAN Or $1875 CASH

$555.00 check sent you at once as an additional prize as below if you answer quickly

As a reward for quick action—we send you check for $555 to add to First Prize Buick Sedan if you win, and directions for getting a 4-door Master Six Buick Sedan. Send answer at once. Costs nothing. No tricks or chances.

5 Cars Given—No More Puzzles to Solve

I will give a beautiful Buick Sedan, also a Chrysler Sedan, also a Nash Sedan, also an Essex Sedan, and a Chevrolet Sedan—5 Cars and a large list of additional costly Prizes—over $6,500. Every Car has four doors and will be delivered FREE to winners by nearest auto dealers. Many have already won Prizes and now to advertise our business you can get this new Buick Sedan or $1,875 Cash.

$555.00 Extra for Promptness

Be prompt. Just find the "twin" pictures of John Alden that are different from all the rest. Look carefully. They all look alike, but two of them are different. Send me the numbers of the two that are different with your name and address at once, then we will tell you how to win the Buick. That's all. Send no money. All who answer can share in Cash and Prizes. In case of ties, duplicate prizes will be given those tying. If you can find the twins send me their numbers right away. Hurry! $555 Cash for promptness.

L. M. STONE, 844 Adams St., Dept. 345
CHICAGO, ILL.

$555.00 for Promptness!

Send No Money Answer Today!

from gravel in the vicinity of Fairbanks. Six months ago, only two dredges were operating in this district. As H. K. P. realizes, these dredges are huge pieces of machinery and much preparation must precede their introduction into interior Alaska. Before they are taken in, detailed exploration of the gravel beds must be made, establishing the fact that there is sufficient gravel to keep them in operation for years to come. All this preliminary work has been going on for a decade but actual production through this method of mining in interior Alaska may be said to have become a reality only last summer.

As might be expected, the effect of this mining activity is obvious in Fairbanks. That far outpost is still sixty per cent a log-cabin town, but to-day the cabins which have been empty for years are filling up with newcomers. One of the three companies operating dredges has seven hundred employees, and the addition of such groups, together with their families, has naturally enlivened the town considerably. In fact, business activities in Fairbanks seem to be approaching boom times.

Nor is this town the only place to be affected. These dredging operations have their reactions at other points along the Alaska railroad. Suntrana, on the Healy River, for example, is the site of a sub-bituminous coal mine which supplies the fuel for the operation of the dredges in the Fairbanks district. The mine owners have found it necessary to greatly increase its production and Suntrana has grown as a consequence.

Now, if there are any more questions about Alaska, just shoot 'em in, and we'll do our best to provide all requested information.

AIRPLANES AND AGRICULTURE

EVERY day one hears of new and interesting ways in which the airplane serves to bring together people who are, figuratively speaking, in the four corners of the earth. Perhaps, however, there is one class of people to whom the invention has meant more than it has to those who wrest their living from nature—whether it be in the Nebraska wheat fields or on the vast frozen tundra of the North.

Some farmers, in fact, own their own planes, as does Jack Westfahl, of Ogallala, Nebraska. Recently, Mr. Westfahl discovered the need of an extra harvest hand, so he jumped into his plane and, in three hours, was in Omaha, a distance of about three hundred miles. There it was necessary to interview twelve men before one was found who was not afraid to fly back to Ogallala. But, even at that, Mr. Westfahl saved time.

A more common use to which the airplane is being put is in the transportation of food supplies to remote hamlets which might, otherwise, have to subsist on canned and dried fare. One Alaskan village was recently thrown into a state of excitement, when an airplane dropped from the skies with a cargo of reindeer meat. It was the first plane that the inhabitants had seen, and their surprise was the more complete when the chief of an Indian tribe that had long been hostile to them, stepped out of the plane for a friendly visit.

The plane was piloted by an American, C. P. Crawford. During favorable seasons, it is planned to take fortnightly trips in order to bring supplies to mining camps that are otherwise inaccessible to Shungnak, the base of the meat supply.

Bald Men Look! FREE

One Full Ampoule of my amazing hair fluid which I discovered myself and which grew hair on my head.

This Ampoule is absolutely free. Don't send any money. There is no C. O. D. No charge whatsoever. All I want is an opportunity to show you how easily I grew hair on my own and hundreds of other men's heads. Merely mail the coupon below for Free Ampoule.

Here is How I Used to Look

I was just as bald as this picture. It is a true photograph without any tampering or retouching. It is exactly like I used to look. Then look at the full head of hair I have in the picture on the left!

As I have stated so often, I don't know whether I am the first man who discovered this great secret, but I do know I have it, that I grew my own hair and that I am growing hair on the heads of other men all the time.

I grew my own hair just as it shows here.

I will prove to you FREE that I can grow hair, quick.

Bald Men Grow Hair Quick!

Here is Brennan
Brennan while he was bald.

And Brennan after Vreeland grew his hair. Write and I will tell you Brennan's story and give you his address.

Here is Wiseman
Wiseman was bald like this.

But Wiseman grew this head of hair with my wonderful hair growing fluid. All about Wiseman and how he did it, if you write. You'll get his address too.

What I accomplished on my own head and on other heads I can do for you, provided you are under 45 years of age and loss of hair was not caused by burns or scars. Anyhow, I must succeed or you pay nothing. No apparatus. My home treatment is simple, quick, inexpensive.

Mail this FREE Coupon

Mail the coupon today—Right Now—I will send you, immediately, one full Ampoule of my marvelous fluid which I discovered, of which I hold the secret and which grew my own hair on my own bald head. Besides the Free Ampoule of Fluid, I will send photographs, names and addresses of men and women who successfully used my Wonder Fluid for Dandruff, Falling Hair and particularly for Baldness.

VREELAND 2771 Euclid-Windsor Bldg. CLEVELAND, OHIO

FREE COUPON

VREELAND 2771 Euclid-Windsor Bldg. CLEVELAND, O.

Please send me, entirely free, one full Ampoule of the same Wonder Hair Fluid which grew your hair.

My Name .....

My Address ..... State .....

MISSING

This department conducted in duplicate in DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE and WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE, thus giving readers double service, is offered free of charge to our readers. Its purpose is to aid them in getting in touch with persons of whom they have lost track.

While it will be better to use your name in the notice, we will print your request "blind" if you prefer. In sending "blind" notices, you must, of course, give us your right name and address, so that we can forward promptly any letters that may come for you. We reserve the right to reject any notice that seems to us unsuitable. Because "copy" for a magazine must go to the printer long in advance of publication, don't expect to see your notice till a considerable time after you send it.

If it can be avoided, please do not send us a "General Delivery" post-office address, for experience has proved that those persons who are not specific as to address often have mail that we send them returned to us marked "not found." It would be well, also, to notify us of any change in your address.

Now, readers, help those whose friends or relatives are missing, as you would like to be helped if you were in a similar position.

WARNING.—Do not forward money to any one who sends you a letter or telegram, asking for money "to get home," et cetera, until you are absolutely certain that the author of such telegram or letter is the person you are seeking.

POWERS, LEWIS C.—Twenty-six years old, six feet tall, and brown eyes. Left Tacoma, Washington, September 6, 1928. Information appreciated by Mrs. Effie Powers, Box 14, Sedro-Woolley, Washington.

L. C.—Why did you do it? I trusted you. Am all alone now. Please write to M., care of this magazine.

McCLANEHAM, CURT and FAT.—Last seen in a logging camp, near Sedalia, Colorado, in June, 1928. Believed to be in Wyoming. Information appreciated by Bill, care of this magazine.

HUGHES, LAWRENCE.—Five feet, six inches tall. One finger on right hand missing. Last known address, in 1921, was 2850 Monmouth Street, Phs, Philippine Islands. Information appreciated by his wife, Mrs. Jennie Hughes, 74 Stone Street, Newark, New Jersey.

DERR, S. A. and E. C.—Last heard of in the West, several years ago. Information appreciated by their sister, Mrs. C. A. Smith, R. R. 2, Clio, Michigan.

FLOYD, G. H.—We expected you to come home and are very worried about you. Please write to M. C. H., care of this magazine.

LANNON, ELIZA JANE.—French Canadian. Born in 1842. Mother died when she was six years old. Her half brother and sisters are living in Canada. Information appreciated by Mrs. Giles Crosse, Winthrop Harbor, Illinois.

WASHBURN.—Will any one by this name, living in Pennsylvania or New York, please write to Mrs. Giles S. Crosse, Winthrop Harbor, Illinois.

ALLEN, MRS. M.—Granddaughter of Fanny Moore. Please write to Mrs. Giles S. Crosse, Winthrop Harbor, Illinois.

SPENCER, HARRY.—Last heard of in Amarillo, Texas, in 1925. Please write to Ted Weighous, 2206 East Tenth Street, Indianapolis, Indiana.

WAKEFIELD, PHYLLIS.—Last heard of in El Paso, Texas, in 1925. Please write to Ted Weighous, 2206 East Tehth Street, Indianapolis, Indiana.

MUNN, BEULAH.—Last known address, Box 151, Cantilla, Texas. Please write to Ted Weighous, 2206 East Tenth Street, Indianapolis, Indiana.

ROBERT, T. L.—We are very anxious. Please let us hear from you. Address Mr. and Mrs. Lilly, care of this magazine.

ATTENTION.—Soldiers at Fort Stevens, Oregon, in 1920 and 1921, who remember me, please write to Van Newkirk, Box 24, Lewellen, Nebraska.

ATTENTION, PATIENTS.—At Whipple Barracks, Arizona, in 1924. I was transferred from there to Palo Alto, California, in July, 1924. Will any one remembering me please write to Van Newkirk, Box 24, Lewellen, Nebraska.

MORRISON, ROBERT HENRY.—Formerly of Detroit, Michigan. Please write to Nellie Morrison, 116 Fletcher Street, Tonawanda, New York.

MORRISON, MAUD.—Last heard from in Corona, Michigan, thirty years ago. Information appreciated by Nellie Morrison, 116 Fletcher Street, Tonawanda, New York.

MARVIN.—My letters to Texas returned. Your children need you. Please come home or write to your wife, 946 May Court, Akron, Ohio.

THOMAS, MRS. SEGRID NELSON.—Came to America, from Sweden, about nineteen years ago. Married Alfred Thomas, in Cripple Creek, Colorado, in 1910. Had one son, Harry, now about seventeen. Last heard from in Butte, Montana, in 1916. Mother ill. Please write to Selma Erickson, 918 Thirteenth Street, Denver, Colorado.

WHEELER, JESSE.—Formerly of Homestead, Oklahoma. Last heard from in Littleton, Colorado. Information appreciated by Margaret Pearman, Gary, Indiana.

ABEL, RITA.—Her name was Martha Johnson before she was adopted. Last heard from when in Meadville, Pennsylvania. Please write to your sister, Mrs. Mary McNeil, 3619 Fifth Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

KEIFER, HARRY P.—Last heard from in Des Moines, Iowa, in 1923. We are all anxious to hear from you. Please write to your brother, C. W. K., care of this magazine.

ALPHONSE.—No word from you since April. Mother is worrying. Please write to Gaston, care of this magazine.

BURGESS, WILLIAM M.—Last heard from in Corsicana, Texas, twenty-three years ago. Information appreciated by his mother, Mrs. Mary Burgess, 2108 Cockrell Avenue, Dallas, Texas.

BUTLER, JAMES M.—Formerly of Savannah, Georgia. Forty years old. Last heard from in Old Mexico, in 1924. Information appreciated by his sister, Mary A. Butler, 115½ West Gold Street, Albuquerque, New Mexico.

ENGLE, ERMINE.—Last seen in Baroda, Michigan, in September, 1926. Important news for him. Information appreciated by his sister, Lorraine Gable, 404 West Navarre Street, South Bend, Indiana.

BRUCE, DAVID and JOHN.—Both of Carthness, Scotland. David was killed in an accident. News of John or his relatives would be appreciated by his niece, J. A. B., care of this magazine.

COLE, CHARLES.—Left Eldon, Durham, England, thirty-six years ago. Last heard from in Newark, New Jersey. Information appreciated by the son of his sister Matilda, Oliver Sains, 115 Hancock Street, Rock Springs, Wyoming.

SHAW, DARIE, NAOMIE, and FULTON.—Information appreciated by their mother, Mrs. Carrie Black, Route 6, Box 503, Houston, Texas.

BATTLER, WILL YOUNG.—Formerly of Rensselaer and Amsterdam, New York. Information appreciated by Raymond Lepp, 1219 First Street, Rensselaer, New York.

EDWARDS, MR. and MRS. HORACE.—Last heard from in Mobile, Alabama. Please write to Jimmie O'Rourke, 10544 Fenkell Avenue, Detroit, Michigan.

WALTERS, FLORENCE.—Red hair and about five feet tall. Formerly of Mobile, Alabama. Stayed at the Waldorf Hotel, Memphis, Tennessee. Information appreciated by Jimmie O'Rourke, 10544 Fenkell Avenue, Detroit, Michigan.

BENARD, M. M.—Five feet, seven inches tall. Dark hair and eyes. Last heard from in Black Diamond, Arizona, fourteen years ago. Information appreciated by his brother, G. C. Benard, 1341 West Ninety-third Street, Cleveland, Ohio.

LLOYD, BILL.—Last heard from in Brunswick, Georgia, in April, 1928. Five feet, eight inches tall, dark-brown hair, brown eyes, and fair complexion. Information appreciated by his brother, Adam Lloyd, 646 North East First Avenue, Miami, Florida.

BIRCHRIDGE, LARRY.—I missed you on the train coming East. Please write to Slim, care of this magazine.

WHITE, PAUL FRANCIS.—Formerly of McKeesport, Pennsylvania. Please write to an old friend, Fred W. Buchner, 336 Forty-second Street, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

CARUSO, CARL.—Nineteen years old. Six feet tall, blond hair, blue eyes, and weighs about one hundred and seventy pounds. Has a scar on the index finger of left hand. Left home May 11, 1928. Your mother is seriously ill. I will not tell any one where you are. Please write to Doctor M. J. J. Coluccy, 829 University Avenue, Madison, Wisconsin.

WARD, MRS. EUGENE, nee JOSEPHINE TURNER.—Daughter of Bell Turner, and niece of Alexander Turner, of County Carern, Ireland. Last heard from in Caledonia, Michigan, in 1903. Information appreciated by her cousin, Sarah Turner Stewart's son, A. T. Stewart, care of this magazine.

JONES, MRS. SALLIE.—Wife of John Jones. Had four children in 1922, when they lived on Day Street, in Denison, Texas. John Jones worked in the Katy Railroad shops. Please write your old friend, Mrs. Jack Glassie, Box 477, Mirando City, Texas.

EDMUND.—Will is very ill. I haven't had a moment's happiness since you left. You are the only one who matters. Please write to E., care of this magazine.

IF—

you pledge yourself

to secrecy we will teach you the secrets of Real Professional

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Dr. Harlan Tarbell
Master of Magic
who has mystified magicians as well as laymen with his marvelous tricks.

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Gentlemen: Without any obligation send me your free literature and information all about your wonderful "Tarbell Course in Magic." Also tell me about your low prices and Easy Payment Plan.

Name .....

Address .....

..... *Age* .....

BICKWITH, LEWIS LEROY.—Eighteen years old. Five feet, seven inches tall. Last seen in Omaha, Nebraska, in 1925. Information appreciated by Mrs. Ruth Perry, 833 West Maine Street, Grand Junction, Colorado.

ROCKY.—I am thirty miles from Condon, near the place Everett gave his rodeo. I still love you and am waiting. Please come or write to Shorty, care of this magazine.

WERLE, DANIEL.—Last heard from eighteen years ago, when he was living on Cook Street, in Brooklyn, New York. Information appreciated by his sister, Mrs. William Jodvin, Box 222, 31 Grove Street, Wauregan, Connecticut.

CAHILL, WILLIAM L.—Forty years old. Light hair and blue eyes. Formerly of McNeil, Texas. Last heard from when he was working as bookkeeper on an Indian reservation in New Mexico. Information appreciated by Mrs. Camby Cahill, McNeil, Texas.

MONTGOMERY, ROBERT C., JR.—Left Wetumka, Oklahoma, ten years ago. It will be to your advantage to get in touch with your father, R. C. Montgomery, care of this magazine.

WIECNOREK, ROSE.—Last heard from in Perth Amboy, New Jersey, five years ago. Please write to Mrs. Pauline Pratt, Box 105, 23 North Walnut Street, Wauregan, Connecticut.

KEEGAN, JOHN.—Left Bunnadden, County Sligo, England, twenty-six years ago, for Boston, Massachusetts. Please write to your nephew, Patrick Keegan, 23 Steven Street, Chester, England.

FLOYD, S.—Have kept up payments on T. Please hurry home or write to B., care of this magazine.

TRACY, SIDNEY.—Formerly of Camp Pike, Arkansas. Please write to Shep., care of this magazine.

TOOMEY, MRS. MAE.—Formerly of Hot Springs, Arkansas. Last heard from in Muncie, Indiana, in 1923. Please write to Esther, care of this magazine.

K. L. H.—Everything O. K. Am heartbroken without you. Important news. Please wire, same address, or write to L. H., care of this magazine.

HILLS, JIMMIE.—My brother. Fourteen years old. Last heard of when he was adopted from the Training School at Chehalis, Washington, seven years ago. Information appreciated by Margaret Hills, Box 114, Sedro-Woolley, Washington.

BENTLY, KNOX.—Please write to your old pal, Percy D. Hagen, Battery E, Eighteenth F. A., Fort Des Moines, Iowa.

TURNER, DAROLDEEN.—Seventeen years old. Last heard of in Laramie, Wyoming. Information appreciated by her brother, Darold Turner, care of J. O. Ammerman, Hull, Nebraska.

PIERRE, GEORGE.—Worked in New York and Chicago. Later traveled through the country painting pictures. Left home thirty-two years ago. Will any relatives desiring further information please write to Andrew Bradshaw, State Hospital, Dixon, Illinois.

FLOY.—I never requested such things to be printed. I will be here all winter. Please write and let me explain. Mother, 435 Jefferson Street, Klamath Falls, Oregon.

DUDLEY.—Charles is back from China, and Sadie will soon be home from New Zealand. Tom is working in the oil fields. Please write or wire Mother, care of J. Whitcomb, 1536 East Fourth Street, Long Beach, California.

FIELDING, MRS. JACK, nee **MARY McGEE.**—Formerly of Marsh Lane, Bootle, Liverpool, England. Left there for New Zealand, nineteen years ago. Information appreciated by Jessie Douglas, care of this magazine.

ASHLEY, STEVE.—Last heard from in Reno, Nevada. Your mother is very ill. Please come home or write to Bobbie Burson, care of this magazine.

JORDAN, LEE.—Last heard from in Colombia, South America, in 1926. All is forgiven. Please come home or write to Ruby, care of this magazine.

STOVAL, BRADY.—Lived near Nanaimo River, British Columbia, Canada, from about 1885 to 1891. Last heard from in Texas. Information appreciated by K. MacL., care of this magazine.

MONTGOMERY, FRED and **PERRY.**—Please write to your brother, Lee Montgomery, 1201 South Main Street, Jacksonville, Illinois.

MACURIO, SAN JOSE and **ELNORA.**—Last heard from in Wisconsin. Information appreciated by their father, Jack Macurio, 14 East Main Street, Carnegie, Pennsylvania.

JEAN or **MARCELLA.**—Believe you were trying to get in touch with me. Please write to Bob, care of this magazine.

SMITH, AMY.—Last heard from in Ada, Oklahoma. Information appreciated by G. H. C., Box 1431, Midland, Texas.

PIERCE, MOSES HENRY, TIMOTHY THOMAS, WILLIAM, and a half brother, **SIM SMITH.**—These boys were living with an uncle, William Pierce, in Salisbury County, Missouri, in 1874. Moses Henry and Timothy Thomas were adopted by Rector Smith, and taken with him to Pickens County, South Carolina, in 1876. The other boys were brought up by a Mr. Beasley, in Salisbury County. Information concerning relatives of these people will be appreciated by Mrs. T. T. Smith, 777 Oak Street, S. W., Atlanta, Georgia.

WIRTCHAFER, or **SCHAFER, JOSEPH.**—Left home on Bainbridge Street, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, thirty years ago. Your father is dead and your mother is ill and asking for you. Please write to Esther Wirtchafer, care of Rose W. Atkinson, Fort Barrancas, Florida.

HELLER, JOHNNIE.—Five feet, eleven inches tall. Scar on cheek, brown hair, and blue eyes. Served in the Philippines for three years and was discharged at Fort Warden, Washington. Left Santoy, Ohio, ten years ago. Last heard from in Butte, Montana, five years ago. Information appreciated by his brother, Wealthy Heller, 371 Rich Street, Columbus, Ohio.

RAND, ALBERT.—Five feet, six inches tall. Light-brown hair and fair complexion. Lived at one time near Scranton, Pennsylvania. We were together on the S. S. "Mystic" on a voyage to the West Coast, from January to April, 1928. Information appreciated by Frank R. Tucker, 515 Fifth Street, Niagara Falls, New York.

DANIELS, IRENE ALLRED.—My letters to your address in Los Angeles were returned. We left Boise in July, 1923. Would like to hear from you. Information appreciated by Ethel Long Thornton, Box 395, M. R. C., Eugene, Oregon.

LAMB, CHARLES HAROLD.—Twenty-seven years old. Brown hair and eyes and about five feet, six inches tall. Last heard from in November, 1921. Please write to Nelson Lamb, 2201 Leech Street, Sioux City, Iowa.

KINKAIDE, JAMES.—About fifty-two years old. Father, Jack, and mother, Martha, died when he was young. Was brought up by relatives in Scotland. His sister, Ellen, was brought up in Ireland and later came to America. Information appreciated by D. T. R., care of this magazine.

EBERHARD, JOHN.—Served in C Company, Fourth Infantry, in the Philippines, from 1899 to 1903, and later in the same company at Fort Brown, Texas. Will any one who served with him please communicate with Mrs. Phebe Eberhard, Lava Hot Springs, Idaho.

NELSON, FRANK.—Left Biddeford, Maine, in 1886, and went to Des Moines, Iowa. For some time drove a stagecoach from Sandwich, New Hampshire, to Dover, New Hampshire. Information appreciated by B. A. F., care of this magazine.

BURRIS, ARTHUR.—Believed to be in California. We were pals in Ellenburg, Washington. I went from there to Harrisburg, Oregon, and then to Sedro-Woolley, Washington. Please write to Theron S. Larrabee, U. S. S. "Yarborough," 314, care of Postmaster, San Diego, California.

BRODLECK, ALBERT.—Swiss. Forty-three years old. Blue eyes and dark hair. Last heard from on the S. S. "Corson." Information appreciated by his sister, Mrs. J. F. Wolff, Box 548, Bisbee, Arizona.

NELSON, EARL I.—About twenty-two years old. Was in the United States navy during 1924-28, stationed on the U. S. S. "Omaha," off the Pacific coast. Please write to your old friend of Kansas City, Missouri, Will A. Kayser, 107 East First South Street, Provo, Utah.

ROBINSON, CHARLES or **CHARLIE.**—Born in Syracuse, New York. Married Anna Noel, from Toronto, Canada, about thirty years ago. Believed to be traveling between California and Alaska. Had two children—one, Muriel Lillian, is dead, and the other is a sick ex-soldier who would like to hear from his father. Please write to Herbert Robinson, Box 151, Buena Vista, Colorado.

PAYNE, RAYMOND S.—I have lost your address. Please write to Ruth, care of this magazine.

ALSON, CLAUDE, JESSIE, and **ALFRED.**—Last heard from in Minden, Nebraska. Please write to Miles E. Sharp, care of this magazine.

CARLSON, MARTIN.—About forty years old. Five feet, four inches tall, black hair. Last heard from in Emmetsburg, Iowa, in 1920. Information appreciated by Dorothy Carlson Berrier, 814 Miners Avenue, Lead, South Dakota.

SHIER, N.—Last known address, Tecumseh House, Thamesville, Ontario, Canada. Believed to be in Michigan. Information appreciated by John Raymond Titcombe, 5 Little Hill, South Venu Avenue, Caversham, Reading, Berkshire, England.

SIMMONS, BUCK.—Eighteen years old. About five feet, eight inches tall, weighs one hundred and forty pounds, and has black hair and eyes. Waiter in cafe. Please write to your sister, Mrs. C. L. G., care of this magazine.

BILL.—Edith is dead. Please write to May, care of this magazine.

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City and State..... *Age*.....

DOLL.—Have not heard from you since you left Robstown. Please write to R. E. Calfee, Brice, Texas.

HARRIS, or LUCAS, FRANK.—Last heard from in Syracuse, New York. Please write to your old buddy, Ralph M. Green, 54th Squadron, March Field, Riverside, California.

HARRIS, FRANCES.—Last heard from in Ottawa, Canada. That letter was thoughtless, and I didn't really mean it. Am sorry. Love you and need you. Please write to Ralph M. Green, 54th Squadron, March Field, Riverside, California.

SMITH, HARRY L., or WHITEY.—Of Detroit. Wife's name is Myrtle. Please write at once to S. V., care of this magazine.

FIELDER, FRED.—Of Cleveland, Ohio. Information appreciated by S. V., care of this magazine.

CARTER, JAMES E.—J. E., Jr., is a darling and needs his daddy. We are desperate. Please send for us. Important letters for you held at this office. Address A. D. C., care of this magazine.

THOMASON, OSCAR.—I am sorry for everything. I love you. Come home; your work awaits you. Your wife, Mrs. O. T., care of this magazine.

L. I. E.—Who advertised for G. L. E. We are holding letters for you at this office. Please send for them.

McLEAN, CHARLES ROLLAND.—Forty-three years old, dark hair, and light complexion. Mother is very ill. Please write to Maurice H. McLean, 274 St. Clair Avenue, Columbus, Ohio.

O'MALLEY, FRANCIS.—Your letter received. Nothing matters now. Please send for letter held at this office. Address Frances, care of this magazine.

M. C. S.—Of course I forgive you. Will go to Kinney's until you send for me. Please write to O. R. S., care of this magazine.

HOBBY, CARL.—Formerly of Hot Springs, Arkansas. Last heard from in November, 1925, when he was a sailor on the U. S. S. "Whippoorwill," at Honolulu, Hawaii. Have recovered from the accident. Information appreciated by Baby S., care of this magazine.

GEESEY, HARRY.—Last heard from in Hermiston, Oregon. Information appreciated by I. B., care of this magazine.

EVA.—From B., Ohio. I still love you. Please write to Bob, care of this magazine.

CASSELL, ELZA C.—Left home two years ago. Last heard from in Villa Park, Illinois. Information appreciated by his wife, Mrs. Lydia Cassell, care of this magazine.

MEYER, JOHN W.—Fifty-three years old. Short and stout. Last heard from in New Orleans, Louisiana, in 1922. Worked for the Bridge Structural Iron Works. Please write to your daughter, Ethel May Meyer, now Mrs. Ethel Stranger, care of this magazine.

RASKY, JOSEPH.—Last heard from when discharged from the army at Fort McDonald, San Francisco, in 1924. Mother worried. Information appreciated by his sister, Mrs. Francis Fahm, 1207-B, Galveston, Texas.

ENCKE, WILLIAM L.—Please send for letter. Address Karl Encke, care of this magazine.

NIELSSON, HELEN.—Seventeen years old. Moved from Canton, Ohio, in June, 1923. Please write to L. L. L., Alliance, Ohio.

GOLDEN, WALTER and WILLIE.—Sons of John Golden. Please write to Charles E. Golden, Route A, Quanah, Texas.

GOLDEN, MARY and EDWARD.—Children of James Golden. Information appreciated by Charles E. Golden, Route A, Quanah, Texas.

BARNES, MARY, nee JACKSON, and JIMMY JACKSON.—Children of Sarah Golden Jackson. Information appreciated by Charles E. Golden, Route A, Quanah, Texas.

GOLDEN, CLEMENTINE.—Please write to Charles E. Golden, Route A, Quanah, Texas.

GROVER, BRANDON.—I am sick and would like to hear from you. Please write to Friend, care of this magazine.

NOAH, CHARLES W.—Twenty-seven years old. Last heard from in Indiana, Pennsylvania, in 1923. Please write to your father and mother, James D. Noah, R. F. D. 1, Newcastle, Pennsylvania.

FAISON, FLORENCE.—Last heard from in Chicago. Please write to your sister, 257 West Twelfth Street, New York City.

MORGAN, DAISY, nee McCLAIN.—Last heard from in South Bend, Indiana, in 1921. Information appreciated by an old chum, B. L. L., Box 21, Westfield, Texas.

VanPELT, T. E.—A machinist. Formerly of Kansas City, Missouri. Please write to Carrie Thompson, 5415 South Main Street, Los Angeles, California.

REID, LIZZIE.—Last heard from in Nokomas, Illinois. Please write to Carrie Thompson, 5415 South Main Street, Los Angeles, California.

KESMER, TOM, ALFRED, and ANNA.—Children of Doctor Henry Kesmer. Information appreciated by Mrs. Maude Green, Box 2, Fulton, Arkansas.

HAMILTON, L. L.—Please come home or write to B. H. 2882 Humboldt Avenue, South, Minneapolis, Minnesota.

THOMAS, GEORGE.—About seventy years old. Last heard from in Illinois or Iowa. Married Ella Elizabeth Bessinger about forty-eight years ago. Had one child, a daughter, Flora Eva Thomas. Information appreciated by his grandson, Bill McClain, care of H. A. Burchard, King City, California.

MOTHIS, W. HOBSON.—Last seen in Amarillo, Texas, in August, 1922. Please write to T. C. Smith, 2500-B First Avenue, Amarillo, Texas.

McKENNA.—My sister's name was Catherine McKenna, and her husband was named Peter. They lived in New York City. Will her children please write to their aunt, Mrs. Ellen McGuire, care of this magazine.

SHELDON, WILLIAM SHERMAN.—Fifty-five years old and about six feet tall. Last heard from in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, eighteen years ago. Information appreciated by his father, Jonas Sheldon, Ladd, Ohio.

ALLEN, KERNER WATTS.—Born in Stokes County, North Carolina, in 1887. Left home, in King, North Carolina, in 1911. Information appreciated by his sister, Mrs. Mabel Allen Talbert, Box 583, Mount Airy, North Carolina.

PECK, FRANK L.—Forty-five years old. Born in North New Berlin, New York. Last heard from in West Virginia, in 1907. Information appreciated by his mother, Mrs. Lottie Peck Kinney, 208 Grace Street, Syracuse, New York.

SHAW, JOSEPH BRATHWAITE.—Last heard from in Raymilton, in March, 1882. Please write to your cousin, Mrs. Haigh, 19 Woodside Terrace, Yorkshire, England.

JIMMY or BENNY.—If you remember the three girls you met in the country, please write to Mary, care of this magazine.

LOGSDON, BEATRICE M.—Last known address was, in 1926, 225 Sixteenth Street, Denver, Colorado. Last heard from en route to Amarillo, Texas, in November, 1926. Information appreciated by M. H., care of this magazine.

HARRINGTON, MABEL.—Last known address was 1730 Logan Street, Denver, Colorado. Believed to be in Los Angeles or Hollywood, California. Information appreciated by M. H., care of this magazine.

SCOTT, JIMMIE, ISABEL, and ALABAMA.—Their father's name was Berry Scott. Last heard from in Miller Valley, Alabama, forty years ago. Information appreciated by Mrs. Neal Bench, Box 116, Amherst, Texas.

JOHNSON, JAMES W.—My father. Last seen in Memphis, Tennessee, eleven years ago. One hand disfigured. Has gray eyes and is about five feet, four inches tall. Information appreciated by H. L. J., care of this magazine.

SCOTT, MRS. EDWARD N., nee ELIZABETH FOX.—Left Scranton, Pennsylvania, five years ago. Last heard from in Missouri, en route for Montana. Information appreciated by her sister, Mrs. Josephine Dombroske, 542 Archibald Street, Scranton, Pennsylvania.

WILLIAMS, HARVEY J., or his children.—Last heard from in Imperial City, California. Please write to Harry Williams, Astoria, Missouri.

BIRES, JOHN, EMMA, and LENA.—Last heard from five years ago, in Detroit, Michigan. Information appreciated by Frank Bires, 15 Fountain Street, Rochester, New York.

SWIFT, HAROLD.—I am very anxious to hear from you. Please write to B. B., Box 123, Port Ewen, New York.

E. H. L.—Am taking good care of Ethel. She is waiting for your return. Don't be long. Please write to Winnie, care of this magazine.

LEGGAN, GEORGE.—Twenty-one years old. Black hair, black eyes, and a dark complexion. Left home in April, 1922. Please come home or write to your mother, Cornelia Leggan, Box 129, Broad Brook, Connecticut.

TURNER, or DAVIS, HENRY.—Brown hair, blue eyes, and a large scar on neck. Last heard from ten years ago. I am very ill. Please come home or write to your mother, Cornelia Leggan, Box 129, Broad Brook, Connecticut.

HENRY, "RIP."—Last heard from in Texas. I have news for you. Please write to your old pal, Catton, care of this magazine.

SILCOX, HERBERT.—Last heard from in Bangor, Maine. Information appreciated by Charles Jenkins, 622 Hammond Street, Bangor, Maine.

ATTENTION.—Would like to hear from the boys who were with the Third Recruiting Party, that left Raritan, New Jersey, in 1919. Address Ray Zies, 1312 Thirtieth Street, Rock Island, Illinois.

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